Ethnic Minority Parents' Involvement in Education: Exploring and Understanding Their Experiences

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Abstract

Lopez, Scribner and Mahitivanichcha (2001) discuss the limited volume of literature that directly addresses ethnic minority parents' involvement in their children's education and they call upon researchers to fill this gap in the literature. This study is one such positive step with its focus on exploring how ethnic minority parents of secondary school students in southern Ontario understand their involvement in their children's education. Participants in the study included three ethnic minority parents recruited from a local adult education centre, and my parents who, as ethnics minority parents, also faced challenges trying to support their children as we progressed through the Ontario educational system. Primary data were collected through in-depth, open-ended interviews approximately one hour in length. Each of the five participants was interviewed twice. Secondary data included Ontario Ministry of Education documents that addressed programs, policies, and supports for ethnic minority students in Ontario secondary schools. Fieldnotes and a research journal also provided secondary data.

The findings highlight, among other things, the challenges the participants faced as ethnic minority parents with a deep desire to support their children's education, but often lacking the cultural capital valued in the Ontario school system to meet that goal. As well, I benefited greatly from this research learning about the various ways in which, in my future work as a teacher of ethnic minority students, I can integrate the knowledge, skills, and experiences of ethnic minorities into my practice to ensure that parents of the non-dominant culture have an opportunity to become highly involved in the education of their children.

Acknowledgements

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the participants in this study for sharing their time, insights, stories, and experiences with me. In spite of their many commitments as parents, spouses, students, and employees, the participants welcomed me into their lives and they granted me the opportunity to learn and become inspired by their experiences as ethnic minority parents in the Ontario school system.

I am truly thankful for having had the opportunity to include my parents as participants in this study. For years, my mother and father have stood by me as my caregivers, providers, and supporters; but, I never realized how much their experiences as ethnic minority parents influenced my choice of study and career. In listening to their stories about their experiences as ethnic minority parents during my years of schooling, I recognized that my passion for second language learning and my dedication and commitment to culturally diverse families are the result of the values my parents instilled in me as a child.

I also wish to thank my husband (Kosta) for encouraging me to persist and strive during some of my most challenging moments as a graduate student. I thank him for constantly reminding me of how rewarding and gratifying it is to be an educator, as well as a life long learner.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

A growing body of literature highlights the importance of parental involvement in the academic achievement and educational experiences of students (Alomar, 2006; Booth & Dunn, 1996; Carvalho, 2001; Constantino, 2003; Henry, 1996; McKenna & Willms, 1998; Pushor & Murphy, 2004; Sirvani, 2007). Constantino explains "that activities such as holding high expectations for students, homework assistance, and sincere adult guidance in balancing and monitoring activities" (p. 21) lead to higher achieving students. Although parental involvement in education is often characterized in terms of guidance, assistance, and in-school participation, certain groups of parents might understand their involvement in their children's education differently. Citizenship and Immigration Canada (2001) indicates that a large number of newcomers living in the metropolitan areas of Ontario arrive in Canada without a high school diploma, speak a foreign language in their homes, and earn an income below one half of the median income. Language proficiency, lack of education, and low income are obstacles for many ethnic minority parents who wish to become involved in the schooling of their children. Educators with stereotypical attitudes and assumptions often label ethnic minority parents as being uninterested or uninvolved in their children's academics (Lopez, Scribner, & Mahitivanichcha, 2001, p. 258). Ontario's school students reflect the continuing growth of ethnic diversity in the community at large (Constantino; Enright, 1989; Harper, 1997); therefore, it is critical that parental involvement of ethnic minority parents in education be addressed so that schools can better serve the culturally, racially, and linguistically diverse school population.

Background to the Research

My interests in researching parental involvement of ethnic minority parents relates to my personal experiences growing up. My parents emigrated from Italy almost 30 years ago. Beginning a life in a new country was difficult and challenging because they could not speak or understand the English language. My father worked at a steel factory and was more exposed to the English language than my mother, who worked at a candy factory where she was surrounded by Italians. My father also spent several years throughout my childhood taking ESL classes at a local adult education center and acquired the ability to engage in short, informal conversations in English when necessary. In my adolescence, my mother told me about the challenges she faced in her first few years in Canada. She had made an attempt to take an ESL class during the time my father was enrolled, but unfortunately her fear of interacting with those who did not speak her native language discouraged her from continuing her studies longer than the first week. My father felt more comfortable using the English he had learned over his first few years in Canada so he did not hesitate to show up to parent-teacher conferences and ask questions about specific school practices and procedures.

During my first few years of elementary school, I remember struggling to learn how to read and write. My classmates talked about their parents helping them read stories before they went to bed. It seemed they were always able to complete their homework because their parents were able to explain to them how to answer a difficult question or how to complete an exercise with complicated instructions. I recall thinking about how unfair it was that my parents could not offer me the same support as a result of the language barrier. Instead, as a child with a limited but developing proficiency in

English, I spent countless hours per week helping my father with his ESL homework. I also spent extensive time running errands with my father so I could act as an English translator in case he encountered any difficulties at the bank or other institutions.

As a child, I did not recognize my parents as being involved in my education; however, as I grow older, I am beginning to realize that I have had a false perception of their involvement. My father was always present at parent-teacher conferences because he truly was concerned about my progress and he wanted to know as much as possible about my strengths and weaknesses. He always seemed eager to accept teachers' advice regarding strategies that could enforce my learning at home. Although my father felt comfortable enough to attend parent-teacher conferences, he often admitted that he did not feel knowledgeable, skilful, and experienced enough to volunteer at the school, assist me with my homework, and engage in knowledgeable discussions with others about educational issues. My mother was equally concerned with my schooling; however, she often expressed her desire to remain distant from the school environment because she felt her lack of education and her inability to speak and understand English would create an uncomfortable and awkward exchange between her and the teachers. Pushor (2007) describes *parent involvement* as being a vehicle that brings teachers and parents together in schools. She sees parent involvement programs as being directed by schools in attempting to involve parents in school activities and teach parents skills and strategies that foster student learning at home. Based on Pushor's description of parent involvement, it is evident that my parents were involved in my education, but they had neither a strong physical presence in the schools I attended nor a voice in the programs, policies, and procedures implemented. As a result, educators might not have considered

my parents as being *engaged* (Pushor) or *highly involved* (Vincent & Martin, 2000) in my education.

Some educators and parents might explain that any difficulties I had in school as a child might have been the result of my parents' lack of physical presence at school; however, the moral and emotional support they offered me throughout my educational experiences was definitely enough to push me to achieve and succeed throughout my years of schooling. In spite of my parents' hesitation to initiate interaction at school and contribute to decisions and changes made within the school system, they definitely had a strong influence on my academic achievements and choices. My parents always emphasized the importance of speaking second languages, and this influenced my decision to study French and Italian throughout high school and university. For years throughout my childhood, I was exposed to English language learning as a result of my father's years of study at a local adult education center for English language learners.

In addition to my personal connection to this topic, my interest in researching parental involvement is also professional. I am currently working at a secondary school with a growing diverse student population. My work as an ESL teacher often reminds me of experiences growing up as a child of ethnic minority parents. The majority of the parents of my ESL students are not, as some educators and parents say, engaged or highly involved parents. The majority of them remain distant from the school environment as my parents did. Although my students' parents have a limited physical presence in the school, I believe it is problematic to assume that they are uninterested and uninvolved in their children's schooling. Perhaps their cultural experiences are not congruent with the experiences of the dominant culture and they therefore decide to

limit their involvement to what they can do from home. As a teacher of students from ethnic minority families, I understand the need to learn about how ethnic minority parents perceive their involvement in the education system and how they interpret the supports and barriers to their children's education. In pursuing this study, I was able to explore the challenges the participants have faced throughout their children's schooling, develop an understanding of the participants' involvement in their children's education, and gain some insight as to how I can support the involvement of ethnic minority parents in my school that are often labelled as uninterested and uninvolved in their children's academics.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of the study is to produce knowledge about ethnic minority parents' involvement in their children's education. Such knowledge will be useful to teachers of ethnic minority students and school officials who make decisions that affect both students and parents in their system. This research also provides a venue for me to reflect on my current teaching practices in light of the findings and to make changes that will strengthen family and school ties to help me meet the needs of culturally diverse students in my classroom. By understanding ethnic minority parents' perceptions and experiences regarding parental involvement, I can contribute to deconstructing stereotypes of ethnic minority parents that exist in my workplace and also initiate discussions around new procedures and practices that integrate the knowledge, skills, and experiences of ethnic minority families in my school. Furthermore, as I turn an analytic lens on my personal experiences as the child of ethnic minority parents and my parents' experiences of schooling their children in an

Ontario system, I am able to understand how my earlier experiences influenced and continue to affect the decisions I make in my professional life.

Research Questions

In this study, I explore the following research questions:

1. How do ethnic minority parents characterize parental involvement in education?
2. How do ethnic minority parents understand their personal involvement in their children's schooling?
3. What are ethnic minority parents' interpretations of the barriers and supports they face in their children's education?
4. How do educators accommodate the needs of ethnic minority parents in schools?
5. How can educators strengthen their relationships with ethnic minority parents?

Outline of Subsequent Chapters

In Chapter Two, I review literature examining the influence of parental involvement on the academic achievement of students and the importance of schools and teachers accommodating the needs of ethnic minority parents and recognizing the cultural resources these parents have that can potentially assist their children to achieve educational goals. I use Bourdieu's (1986) theory of cultural capital to explain why some ethnic minority parents might not have a strong physical presence in their children's schools, and I draw on recent studies that discuss deficit thinking to demonstrate how some educators hold deficit views of ethnic minority parents who

seem uninvolved in their children's education (Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Samaras & Wilson, 1999; Yosso, 2005). To conclude, I discuss Yosso's proposal to use the concept of community cultural wealth to deconstruct educators' deficit views of ethnic minority parents and to recognize ethnic minority parents' different understandings of parental involvement and the cultural resources that they have that can assist their children in achieving academically.

In Chapter Three, I begin by providing a rationale for choosing to use qualitative methodology in the study. I discuss my goals and my researcher positioning. In addition, I explain the choice of participants for my study and offer a detailed profile of each participant. Next, the chapter includes the methods of data collection and analysis and addresses other ethical considerations related to the research. Last, a detailed description of the challenges experienced during the collection of data is offered, and the boundaries and limitations of the study are discussed.

In Chapter Four, I outline the main research questions of the study and provide a detailed description of the major themes that emerge from the data. I also provide an analysis of documents by the Ontario Ministry of Education that address various initiatives recently implemented to accommodate the needs of the growing diverse student population in Ontario elementary and secondary schools.

In Chapter Five, I discuss my understanding of my parents' experiences as ethnic minority parents in an unfamiliar education system and the ways in which they have shaped my current practices. In addition, I outline recommendations based on my findings, and I suggest various ways in which I can enrich my understanding of ethnic minority parents' involvement in education in future research.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Ontario Immigration (2005), Ontario has the largest ethnic minority population in Canada, with one in four residents born outside the country (People and Culture Section, para. 1). As a result of the diversity that exists in Ontario's classrooms, school boards are focusing on the development of curriculum and programs that accommodate ethnic minority students as they familiarize themselves with new routines, expectations, values, and culture. Many of the initiatives that have been put into place for ethnic minority students relate to English language learning because a large number of these students are not proficient in the English language. The Ontario Ministry of Education (2007c) developed the first *Grades 9 to 12 English as a Second Language and English Literacy Development* curriculum document in 1999 and released a revised edition in September of 2007. The Ministry has also recently released its first policy document for English language learners for Ontario elementary and secondary school students entitled *English Language Learners: ESL and ELD Programs and Services* (2007a). This is the first time that the Ontario Ministry of Education has dedicated an entire document to the needs of English language learners in Ontario. Prior to 2007, information about support programs for English Language Learners was briefly taken up in the *Ontario Secondary Schools Grades 9 to 12: Program and Diploma Requirements* (1999) document. Furthermore, *Many Roots Many Voices: Supporting English Language Learners in Every Classroom* is a document recently developed "to support teachers, principals, and other education professionals at the elementary and secondary levels in working effectively with English Language Learners" (Ministry of Education, 2007b, p. 4). Of course not all

ethnic minority students lack English proficiency; however, providing language support is one of many initiatives that have been put in place to accommodate the needs of ethnic minority students in Ontario schools.

Recent literature (Arkoudis, 2006; Duff, 2001; N. Lopez, 2002; Verdugo & Flores, 2007) emphasizes the need for schools to implement programs, policies, curricula, and specific strategies that help accommodate the cultural and linguistic needs of ethnic minority students so that they succeed academically. Based on my personal experiences as a teacher in a culturally diverse classroom, I recognize the importance of accommodating the needs of both the diverse student population and ethnic minority parents. Current studies highlight the positive influence that parental involvement has on the academic achievement of students (Booth & Dunn, 1996; Carvalho, 2001; Constantino, 2003; Samaras & Wilson, 1999; Sook Lee & Bowen, 2006). According to Samaras and Wilson, "when parents have visibility and vitality in a school, teachers and parents come to know about each other's concerns and needs, which promotes the students' learning" (p. 501). Similarly, Pushor and Murphy (2004) explain that "parental involvement in schooling fosters more positive student attitudes towards school, improves homework habits, reduces absenteeism and dropping out, and improves academic achievement" (p. 22). An emphasis on parents being visible in the school might lead some educators to assume that adequate parental involvement exists only when parents are physically present in their children's school.

Parental involvement in education can be interpreted in various ways depending on whose understanding of the concept is being taken into consideration. Pushor (2007) demonstrates that parent involvement differs from parent engagement. As mentioned

earlier, Pushor understands parent involvement as the schools' efforts in teaching and informing parents about various strategies that foster student learning at home. On the other hand, she believes that *parent engagement* refers to parents sharing their knowledge, skills, and experiences in their children's schools so that they can inform decision-making, the determination of agendas, and the individualized programming and planning in place for their children at school. Vincent and Martin (2000) use the term *high parental involvement* to describe parents' consistent physical presence in the school and their contributions to the practices and policies implemented within the system. Research demonstrates that some ethnic minority parents might not be engaged or highly involved in their children's education; however, they might recognize their involvement in terms of informal activities. According to G. Lopez et al. (2001), some ethnic minority parents might view their parental involvement "in terms of informal activities such as providing nurturance, instilling cultural values, talking with their children, sending them to school clean and rested, checking homework, and a variety of other non-traditional activities" (p. 256). Although some ethnic minority parents want to be engaged or highly involved in their children's education, they may find parental engagement challenging because their lack of English proficiency, employment demands, lack of resources, and other family responsibilities stand in the way of their involvement. As a result of the various ways that parental involvement in education is perceived, ethnic minority parents' involvement may not be recognized as parent engagement or high parental involvement by some educators and parents of the dominant culture.

According to Horvat, Weininger and Lareau (2003), involvement of parents of

the dominant culture sometimes differs considerably from the involvement of ethnic minority parents in schools. Based on their findings, the researchers conclude that parents of the dominant culture are much more proactive about the educational needs of their children. When a family is made aware of an issue regarding the academic achievement of their child, members of the family gather information and receive advice by networking. Parents often discuss these issues with family and friends in the field of education. In contrast, ethnic minority parents rarely intervene or dispute issues about their children's education even if they are concerned about some of the practices and policies that are implemented. Horvat et al. suggest that "these parents tend to handle the problematic situations that arise in the course of their children's schooling on a purely individual basis" (p. 464). In other words, ethnic minority parents do not ignore issues that arise, but they deal with problematic situations individually without seeking advice and information elsewhere. It would be unreasonable to assume that all ethnic minority parents do not seek advice and assistance regarding their children's education; however, in my experience as a teacher of students from culturally diverse families, the majority of parents seek information through their children as opposed to physically appearing at the school themselves.

There is no doubt that many ethnic minority parents are involved in their children's education; however, they may choose to remain at arm's length or detached from the school environment for various reasons. According to Samaras and Wilson (1999), "family background, language barriers, inequalities of parents' resources, conceptions of parent-teacher roles, and communication and contact between teachers and communities may affect families' interactions with schools" (p. 502). Bourdieu

(1986) used the term *cultural capital* to describe the beliefs, languages, resources, and social networks that influence the life experiences of individuals. The cultural capital of ethnic minority parents might differ significantly from that of educators and parents of the dominant culture; therefore, ethnic minority parents might feel as if they do not possess the knowledge, skills, and experiences required to converse with educators and support their children in the school.

Defining Cultural Capital

Building on Bourdieu's (1986) work, recent literature describes cultural capital as being the material resources, the social networks, the beliefs, and the life experiences that influence student academic achievement (Carreon, Drake, & Barton, 2005; Monkman, Ronald, & Theramene, 2005). Bourdieu describes three forms of cultural capital. The *embodied state* is the first form of cultural capital that exists within a person and represents the knowledge, skills, and talents of that person. The *objectified state* of cultural capital is represented by cultural goods such as artifacts, literature, music, dance forms, art, historical sites, and museums (Monkman et al., p. 11). These cultural goods can be appropriated materially as economic capital and symbolically as cultural capital. Finally, the third form is *institutional cultural capital* such as the academic credentials and educational qualifications that empower individuals in society.

Bourdieu (1986) uses the concept of cultural capital as a starting point to explain how the resources and experiences students bring into their learning environments influence their academic success and failure. However, cultural capital can also be used to explain ethnic minority parental involvement in schools. In Horvat

et al. (2003) study on parental involvement, they find that parents of the dominant culture are able to act as advocates for their children in their schools because they have access to information and support through networking. They are able to acquire what Bourdieu describes as an embodied state of cultural capital by gaining knowledge about the education system through family and friends in the field of education. On the other hand, many ethnic minority parents choose to deal with educational concerns on an individual basis because they may not have access to the information that gives them the voice and the confidence to make requests and express concerns. Many ethnic minority parents do not have the embodied form of cultural capital that is congruent with that of the dominant culture, so many choose to remain distant and silent.

Bourdieu (1986), along with others who support and build on the concept of cultural capital, are not suggesting that underachieving students and uninvolved parents lack cultural capital. According to Lareau and McNamara-Horvat (1999), all individuals have cultural capital; however, "cultural capital does not have the same value in any given field" (p. 39). In other words, the cultural capital valued in one setting might not necessarily be valued in other settings. Lareau and McNamara-Horvat use attendance at art museums and attendance at baseball games to demonstrate how cultural capital is valued in different settings. The researchers explain that certain people assign higher status to attendance at art museums than attendance at baseball games. Parents who visit museums with their children may be viewed as more involved in their children's education because this form of objectified cultural capital reflects the capital valued by the dominant culture. Ethnic minority parents may appear to be uninvolved in their children's education because their knowledge, skills, and cultural

resources are perceived as having little or no influence on their children's academic achievement.

Why Are Ethnic Minority Parents Portrayed as Uninvolved in Their Children's Education?

Studies reveal that educators perceive parents who are not physically present in their children's schools as uninvolved and uninterested, and these parents are often blamed for the underachievement of their children (Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Samaras & Wilson, 1999). G. Lopez et al. (2001) explain that sometimes professionals meet with ethnic minority parents only when problems occur; therefore, under such circumstances, parents are often perceived as lacking resources, such as experience, knowledge, and skills to provide meaningful home educational experiences for their children. According to Delpit (1998), the act of blaming poor academic achievement on the child, their families, and their cultural disadvantage is known as *deficit thinking*. Munn (1993) explains that educators have negative, stereotypical views of ethnic minority parents because they have not been trained to deal with ethnic minority parents on a professional level. Delpit suggests that deficit views of ethnic minority families exist because White, middle-class homes are seen as the norm; therefore, any attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours that do not reflect the norm are viewed as the causes of students' underachievement. Yosso (2005) describes deficit thinking as one of the most prevalent forms of contemporary racism in schools: "Deficit thinking takes the position that minority students and families are at fault for poor academic performance because: (a) students enter school without the normative cultural knowledge and skills; and (b) parents neither value nor support their child's education" (p. 75). In other

words, the educators' deficit views place blame on students and their families for student misbehaviour or underachievement and deny any links the school system may have with the student outcomes.

According to G. Lopez et al. (2001), believing that ethnic minority parents lack the cultural capital to provide their children with meaningful educational experiences can only further alienate parents from their children's schooling. If programs, policies, and strategies are not put into place to accommodate the needs of ethnic minority parents and to recognize their cultural resources as assets to their children's learning, some parents might feel that their knowledge and skills have no influence on their children's academic experiences, and so they continue to remain distant and silent. If ethnic minority parents remain distant and silent, educators may continue to "perpetuate a blame-the-parents syndrome which has often been the excuse for schools to sit back and avoid developing school-community consultation" (Munn, 1999, p. 136).

Opinions and assumptions that emerge from deficit thinking deny and ignore many ways in which ethnic minority parents and families are involved in the educational experiences of their children behind closed doors (Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Samaras & Wilson, 1999). Current research describes ways in which ethnic minority parents are involved. The moral and emotional support that ethnic minority parents offer often goes unnoticed because this type of involvement is hidden behind closed doors. Auerbach (2007) identifies a group of parents as *the Supporters* in her study of parental involvement, and she describes how racial and ethnic minority parents involve themselves in the education of their children. She states that these parents were quite

often involved in

> stressing the importance of education, and talking to children about university and careers, as well as setting limits on behaviour . . . the supporters offered their own experience, in cautionary tales designed to steer children away from their own example and motivate them to do well in school. (p. 263)

By emphasizing the importance of education and making reference to their limited educational experiences as children, these ethnic minority parents offer their children moral and emotional support with the hope of motivating them to achieve academically.

Deconstructing Deficit Views Through Community Cultural Wealth

Yosso (2005) proposes *community cultural wealth* as a concept that has the potential, if understood, to change the process of schooling and the attitudes and beliefs of the system regarding disadvantaged students and parents. Yosso describes community cultural wealth as "an array of knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression" (p. 77). In proposing this concept, Yosso suggests that educators emphasize community cultural wealth in order to shift the focus from the abilities that students are lacking when they come to school to knowledge that culturally diverse students bring with them from their homes and communities into the classroom. Acknowledging the experiences and the different types of knowledge and skills culturally diverse students bring into the classroom could potentially help students, parents, and teachers realize that students' prior knowledge and experiences can serve as a foundation upon which they can build new knowledge and skills. In addition to

identifying the various forms of knowledge, skills, and experiences of culturally diverse students, educators can further familiarize themselves with students' community cultural wealth by recognizing their familial capital, social capital, aspirational capital, and linguistic capital.

Although Yosso (2005) defines community cultural wealth in terms of the resources that culturally diverse students possess, this concept can also be applied to the forms of capital that ethnic minority parents carry with them as they attempt involvement in a new education system. A closer look at research will demonstrate how understanding and employing community cultural wealth can motivate and engage ethnic minority parents in the educational experiences of their children.

Putting Community Cultural Wealth Into Practice

When community cultural wealth is understood, the knowledge, skills and experiences that ethnic minority parents have to assist their children in their learning are more visible. In a study conducted on parental involvement in mathematics education, Civil and Bernier (2006) demonstrate how ethnic minority parents can serve as intellectual resources in the classroom. Civil and Bernier explain that these parents bring other ways of doing mathematics, some of which educators have not seen before. The researchers suggest a framework which entails ethnic minority parents and teachers of students at various grade levels working together in facilitating workshops to other parents and teachers to show them the various ways of doing mathematics. Civil and Bernier make it clear that they were "dedicated to creating a space to have an authentic dialogue about mathematics and to look for and value families' funds of knowledge" (p. 327). This idea of valuing families' funds of knowledge reflects

Yosso's (2005) theory on acknowledging the experiences and the different types of knowledge and skills culturally diverse students bring into the classroom. By collaborating with ethnic minority parents, educators ensure parents that their knowledge and skills are valuable to their children's education and educators recognize that ethnic minority parents have cultural resources that might not reflect dominant standards, however their resources can provide their children with a foundation upon which new knowledge is built. In recognizing and valuing families' funds of knowledge, a sense of reciprocity between educators and parents is fostered. This sense of reciprocity not only allows ethnic minority parents to become involved, but it enables them to become engaged in their children's learning (Pushor, 2007). Ethnic minority parents may feel intimidation when working with teachers; however, Civil and Bernier "believe it to be a powerful framework for parents to experience, especially working-class/language/ethnic minority parents" (p. 328).

Emphasizing community cultural wealth in schools does not necessarily mean inviting parents into the school to work with their children and/or teachers on a regular basis. In fact, putting community cultural wealth into practice might involve making the curriculum relevant to the lives of students by integrating students' home lives, languages, and past experiences into the classroom activities and assignments (Enright, 1989). Enright describes "the rich potential of using students' family narratives and stories in class in order to support students' literacy development and to develop literacy discourse" (p. 185). She also mentions the change in home-school relations as a result of asking students to write and tell their stories in class. Although parents might not be directly involved in writing the family narratives alongside their children, just

knowing that their children are involved in documenting stories about their family and culture may give them the confidence to inquire about their school work and possibly offer them assistance. When students identify and document personal histories and stories, parents may recognize how their family cultural assets and wealth can be used as a foundation upon which their children build knowledge, and educators become aware of the resources and experiences that these families bring with them into the school and community. This practice can of course be problematic for some students and families, for example refugee families who have experienced hardships and trauma in their lives. Teachers have a responsibility to practice caution in creating assignments and delivering lessons that involve the personal experiences of their students (Enright).

In addition to valuing families' funds of knowledge and making curriculum relevant to the lives of students, educators can also put community cultural wealth into practice by acknowledging the challenges some ethnic minority parents experience in their children's schools as a result of their lack of proficiency in English. Leistyna (2002) suggests that schools provide families with information about programs, policies, and events in various languages so that all parents are given the opportunity to understand the school system. Leistyna conducts a study at a school that is working towards building a multicultural education program, and he discusses the various ways in which the school accommodates ethnic minority parents who normally remain distant from the school because of the language barrier. The school develops outreach information packets that are sent home in various languages for newcomer families. This is one of many examples of the school's efforts to recognize the knowledge, skills, and abilities that families bring into the school and the community. When newcomer

families are given information in their native languages, Leistyna explains that some ethnic minority parents feel more comfortable in asking their children and educators questions regarding various school practices and procedures. In discussing the importance of providing ethnic minority parents with the opportunity to learn about the new education system in their native languages, Leistyna demonstrates how recognizing the cultural knowledge and linguistic abilities of ethnic minority parents can facilitate their involvement in schools.

Leistyna (2002) reminds educators that recognizing the knowledge, skills, and abilities of ethnic minority families should not merely involve inviting parents to the school to show off and celebrate their cultures. He believes that parental participation of ethnic minority parents should "be about real political inclusion in the basic processes and decisions of everyday school life" (p. 8). By creating a welcoming school environment equipped with language support and staff that represents different cultural backgrounds and experiences, Leistyna explains that ethnic minority parents might feel less intimidated in sharing their ideas and opinions regarding school procedures, policies, and programs. This idea of creating an environment in which multilingual dialogue and the sharing of opinions and ideas takes place reflects Pushor's (2007) explanation of parent engagement, and it demonstrates how community cultural wealth can be used as a framework to improve parental involvement of ethnic minority parents.

According to Sook Lee and Bowen (2006), educators must recognize that "there are variations among parents with different backgrounds in terms of when and how they are involved in their children's education" (p. 215). If educators understand the

various ways in which ethnic minority parents are involved in their children's education, schools can begin to shift away from the deficit views that label these parents as uninterested, uninvolved, and disadvantaged, and they can focus on parents' cultural assets and wealth. Building on students' community cultural wealth by creating ties between students, parents, and educators, making the curriculum relevant to the lives of students and parents, and providing language support for families are first steps in strengthening the relations between schools and ethnic minority parents so that all parties are engaged in the learning of all students.

Summary of Literature Reviewed

There is an awareness of the positive influence parental involvement has on the academic achievement of students (Booth & Dunn, 1996; Carvalho, 2001; Constantino, 2003). Studies show that ethnic minority parents' attitudes, beliefs, and understanding of parental involvement may differ from those of parents and teachers of the dominant culture (Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Horvat et al., 2003; G. Lopez et al., 2001; Samaras & Wilson, 1999; Sook Lee and Bowen, 2006). They also indicate that many ethnic minority parents believe that their knowledge, skills, and abilities cannot assist them in helping their children succeed academically; therefore, they choose to remain distant from the schools and limit their involvement to what they can do from home. When educators are unaware of the various ways ethnic minority parents are involved in the education of their children, stereotypical opinions and assumptions of parental involvement emerge.

Yosso (2005) proposes using community cultural wealth as a framework to deconstruct deficit views of student learning. Studies demonstrate that community

cultural wealth can also be applied when deconstructing the deficit views that exist regarding parental involvement of ethnic minority parents in education (Civil & Bernier, 2006; Enright, 1989; Leistyna, 2002; Sook Lee & Bowen, 2006). Research suggests that when educators acknowledge the knowledge, skills, and abilities ethnic minority parents possess, these parents can begin to understand that their prior knowledge and experiences can influence school procedures, programs, and policies and that their knowledge can also serve as a foundation upon which their children can build new knowledge and skills. Bringing students, parents, and educators together to learn about their different types of knowledge and skills, incorporating cultural experiences into the curriculum, and providing ethnic minority parents with various supports within schools are some examples of initial steps that can be taken by educators in attempting to understand the various ways ethnic minority parents are involved in their children's schooling.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

I chose to conduct an interpretive qualitative study to explore the perspectives of a specific group of people and interpret how they make sense of particular experiences in their sociocultural environment (Borko, Liston, and Whitcomb, 2007). My goal as a qualitative researcher is to develop an understanding of ethnic minority parents' perception of their involvement in the schooling of their children. I chose to conduct in-depth interviews, and ask open-ended questions (See Appendix A) to develop such an understanding.

Identifying and Positioning Myself as Researcher

If I think back to my childhood, I remember feeling marginalized as a child of immigrant parents. Unlike most of my classmates, my parents could not help me with my homework, and I had the responsibility of being my father's interpreter and English translator. If someone had asked me 5 years ago to identify myself as a young student, I would have stated that I am a Canadian-born female of Italian descent. In the past, I did not identify myself as a speaker of the English language because I had never taken into account how language plays a role in who I am and how I present myself. As a result of my experiences as an ESL teacher, I realize how privileged I am to be able to speak the language of the dominant culture and to be able to walk into any room, any building, and any institution around me having the cultural capital that gives me the power to live, learn, understand and express myself. After 3 years of working with ethnic minority students, I now identify myself as a Canadian-born, White, privileged, English- speaking, female of Italian descent. It is this identity that I enact as I pursue

my research interest and develop a deep understanding of ethnic minority parents' experiences in the education system.

As I set out on this journey as a novice researcher, I position myself as an interpretivist. Schram (2003) explains that an interpretivist researcher aims "to understand this complex and constructed reality from the point of view of those who live in it" (p. 33). As an interpretivist, my goal is to understand how ethnic minority parents perceive their involvement in their children's education as well as the barriers and supports parents face in the educational system. Using Sherif's (2001) discussion on insider/outsider status, I would classify myself as a partial insider. Several years ago, I worked as a part-time ESL teacher at a local adult education center. I grew up as a child of ethnic minority parents and have professional experiences as an ESL teacher in a Catholic secondary school. I witnessed my parents' experiences as ethnic minority parents in the education system for years, and I currently interact with ethnic minority families on a regular basis as a secondary ESL teacher. My experiences as a partial insider have helped me develop questions regarding the topic that will hopefully guide me to a deeper understanding of ethnic minority parents' experiences supporting their children's education.

However, I must be cautious that my partial insider status does not inappropriately influence my work as a researcher. As a result of my personal and professional experiences, I have developed an emotional connection to ethnic minority families. As opposed to evoking pity or perhaps portraying ethnic minority parents as victims in the education system, my goal as a researcher is to better understand their

experiences so that I can fine-tune my practice as a teacher to ensure that all my students are given a fair opportunity to achieve success.

Participant Recruitment

The participants consist of 2 male and 1 female ethnic minority parents that currently have children in secondary schools in southern Ontario. These participants differ in ethnic backgrounds. The parents have been recruited from an adult education center. I provided information about the study through posters and word of mouth. In addition to interviewing the 3 participants from the adult education center, I also interviewed both of my parents about their past experiences as ethnic minority parents of children in Ontario schools. The participants were made fully aware of the requirements for participation through the informed consent process dictated by the *Research Ethics Board* criteria.

Interviewing My Parents

As mentioned earlier in Chapter One, my parents' experiences as immigrants have influenced my interest in wanting to research ethnic minority parents' experiences in their children's education. As a child of immigrant parents, I remember my parents feeling self-conscious about their lack of English proficiency, their inability to help me with my homework, and their limited knowledge and understanding of the school system in Ontario. I decided to include my parents as participants in this study so that I could further explore their challenges as ethnic minority parents as well as their understanding of their involvement in their children's education. Fontana and Frey (2000) believe that "in trying to understand the 'other' we learn about 'ourselves'" (p. 714). By interviewing my parents and forming an understanding of their perceived

challenges and involvement, I feel that I can better understand how they influenced my choices and actions throughout my life. In forming an understanding of their experiences, I also feel that I am able to connect and relate to the experiences of the other participants in the study as well as the literature related to ethnic minority parents' experiences in the education of their children.

I realized that inviting my parents to participate in the study could have been a possible risk because they may have felt obligated or coerced into contributing to the research because of our close relationship. I informed them individually of their choices prior to having them sign the consent form. I explained to each of them that the study could stand alone without their participation; however, their experiences and opinions regarding parental involvement of ethnic minority parents in schools would provide my study with additional perspectives. I also made clear to each of them that if one felt the need to decline participation, the study would not suffer any negative consequences and I would not be disappointed in his/her decision.

Description of Participants

Three of the individuals portrayed in this thesis have been assigned the pseudonyms Pat, Anthony, and Rose. My mother and father granted me permission to use their first names, Ida and Filippo, and have allowed me to refer to them as my parents throughout the study. They agreed that their participation in the study would help me make a personal connection to the data, adding to the richness of the study. The *Participant Profile* includes information I recorded in my research journal and fieldnotes during the interviews (See Appendix B). I provide a point-form description

of the participants on the following pages so that readers can become acquainted with them. Following the point-form descriptions, I describe each participant in more detail.

Participant Profile

1. Ida (my mother):

- 49 years of age
- Immigrated to Canada from Italy 30 years ago
- Speaks Italian as first language
- Completed elementary school in Italy
- Married to an Italian immigrant (Filippo; my father)
- Two sons, one daughter
- All children born in Canada
- All children graduated from Ontario education system.
- Two oldest children work full-time; youngest child attends a Canadian university

2. Filippo (my father):

- 49 years of age
- Immigrated to Canada from Italy 30 years ago
- Speaks Italian as first language
- Completed elementary school in Italy
- Studied English at an adult education center in Ontario for several years
- Married to an Italian immigrant (Ida; my mother)
- Two sons, one daughter
- All children born in Canada
- All children graduated from Ontario education system.

- Two oldest children work full-time; youngest child attends a Canadian university

3. Pat:

- 55 years of age
- Immigrated to Canada from Greece 35 years ago
- Speaks Greek as first language
- Completed elementary school and two years of secondary school in Greece
- Married to a Greek immigrant
- Two daughters, one son
- All children born in Canada
- Two children graduated from Ontario education system and work full-time; youngest child attends an Ontario secondary school

4. Anthony:

- 38 years of age
- Immigrated to Canada from Portugal 10 years ago
- Speaks Portuguese as first language
- Completed secondary school in Portugal
- Married to a Portuguese immigrant
- Two sons
- Both children born in Portugal
- One son attends an Ontario elementary school; one son attends an Ontario secondary school

5. Rose:

- 41 years of age

- Immigrated to Canada from El Salvador 8 years ago
- Speaks Spanish as first language
- Completed elementary school and 3 years of secondary school in El Salvador
- Married to an El Salvadorian immigrant
- Two daughters
- Both children born in El Salvador
- Older daughter graduated from an Ontario secondary school and works full-time; youngest daughter attends an Ontario secondary school

Below is a more detailed description of each participant, elaborating on the points made in the participant profile.

Ida (My Mother)

My mother's interview was my first interview. Ida is 49 years old, she's married to Filippo (my father), and she works for a hospital laundry service. Her three children are me, age 28, a high school teacher and graduate student; Tony, age 24, a store manager; and Joseph, age 21, a fourth-year student at an Ontario university. Her three children were born in Canada, and each of them graduated from Ontario elementary and secondary schools. Although she immigrated to Canada 30 years ago and has been living in Canada ever since, she still struggles to express herself clearly in English. She is very self-conscious of her English proficiency, and she refers to her awkwardness in using the English language a few times prior to the first interview. I note her apprehension in my research journal after our first interview.

> *Before the interview she asked me a few times if anyone else was going to listen to the audiotape. She feels really self-conscious about her English and concerned about someone listening to the audiotape and hearing her errors. (Journal Entry, June 10, 2008, p. 14)*

As a result of her uneasiness, I tried my best to make her feel comfortable and to remind her of the confidentiality that exists between a researcher and participant which is dictated by the *Research Ethics Board* criteria. Regardless of her challenges to communicate her thoughts clearly in English, Ida provided me with a comprehensible understanding of her experiences as an ethnic minority parent in the Ontario education system. Occasionally she used her Italian if she could not think of the correct word in English, but this did not affect my understanding of her experiences because I am also fluent in the language.

Filippo (My Father)

My father is also 50 years of age, and he immigrated to Canada from Italy 30 years ago after having married my mother (Ida). My father has not been employed for over 20 years due to an unfortunate accident he had at a construction site. Instead of working, he spent several years studying English at a local adult education center, hoping that he could one day achieve the level of proficiency that would allow him to get a high school and a college diploma. After several years of study, my father realized that learning English and then working towards obtaining a high school and college diploma would take too long, so he decided that it was in his best interest to be a stay-at-home dad. Despite his Italian accent and his struggle to speak English fluently, my father demonstrated confidence in his explanation of his understanding of parental involvement in education.

Pat

Pat is a 55-year-old man that immigrated to Canada from Greece 35 years ago. He completed 2 years of high school in Greece but decided to leave school before

obtaining his diploma to work and help support his parents. At the young age of 20, he followed some relatives to Canada in search of economic opportunity. He worked as a cook at various restaurants for years and eventually managed to open up his own restaurant. He has been a successful entrepreneur for nearly 20 years. For years, Pat has been attending English classes at the local adult education center because he feels that practicing the language helps him to feel more comfortable when completing paperwork for the family business. Pat and his wife, who is also a Greek immigrant, have three children that were all born in Canada. Their older daughter, Joanne, graduated from an Ontario university a few years ago and now works as a teacher. Pat's son recently graduated from an Ontario university and currently works as a chemical engineer. His younger daughter attends an Ontario secondary school and also works part-time for the family business. Although Pat's first language is Greek, he speaks English fluently with very little difficulty in expressing his thoughts and opinions. In my research journal, after my first interview with Pat, I noted his tone of confidence and his ability to articulate his ideas.

> *You can tell that he has been in Canada for a long time because he speaks English so well. Aside from his exotic accent, you would never know English isn't his first language. I barely ever stopped the tape for him during the interview and he rarely ever asked for any clarification of questions and comments. (Journal Entry, July 1, 2008, p. 21)*

After having interviewed 3 established ethnic minority parents that have lived more than half of their lives in Canada, I decided to include 2 other participants in my study that are somewhat newer to Canada and to the Ontario education system.

Anthony

Anthony is a 38-year-old man that immigrated to Canada from Portugal 10 years ago with his wife and two sons. In Portugal, Anthony had been working as a carpenter since graduating from high school. Anthony made the decision to come to Canada with his wife and children to be together with his parents and younger brother, who had been living in Canada for many years. Over the last 10 years, Anthony has been working for a construction company while his wife has been raising the children at home. Recently, Anthony decided to study English in the evenings so that he can improve his English proficiency and then hopefully apply to a college program in which he can study to become a licensed electrician. Anthony's older son, Jonathan, attends an Ontario secondary school, and his younger son, Tom, attends an Ontario elementary school. Unlike the first 3 participants, Anthony not only experienced the challenges as a newcomer to a new country and a new language, but he also experienced the challenges of bringing his young children into a new country and into a foreign education system in which they initially struggled as English language learners.

Rose

Rose is the most recent newcomer to Canada out of the 5 participants in the study. She came to Canada from El Salvador only 8 years ago with her husband and two daughters. Since her arrival to Canada, she has been studying English and working part-time at a candy factory. Similar to Anthony's experiences, Rose has also had to deal with the pressures of supporting her children as English language learners in an unfamiliar school system. Rose's older daughter has recently graduated from high school and she is working to save money for her postsecondary education. Her younger

daughter is currently attending an Ontario secondary school and she plans to graduate in the next year. Although Rose has been living in Canada for only eight years, she communicated her thoughts and opinions regarding parental involvement quite clearly. Her descriptive discussion regarding her involvement in education demonstrated the time, hard work, and dedication she has been putting towards learning the English language.

Data Collection

In the next section, I provide a detailed description of the various ways in which I collected data for this study.

Interviews

In this study, the primary data were collected through interviews. Fontana and Frey (2000) note that "interviewing is one of the most common and powerful ways in which we try to understand our fellow humans" (p. 705). The interviews were in-depth and open-ended so that participants were given the opportunity to give detailed descriptions and explanations of their experiences. Fontana and Frey explain that interviews are conversational for the purpose of understanding the participants' experiences without inasmuch as possible "imposing any a priori categorization that may limit the field of inquiry" (p. 706). Also, the questions were worded carefully and clearly so that they were comprehensible for the participants, whose first languages were not English.

I conducted two interviews with each of the 5 ethnic minority parents. In the first interview, I attempted to gain some insight into how the parents perceived and understood their involvement in their children's education. The second interview with

participants took place for the purpose of member checking. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the member check is essential in establishing credibility because it allows researchers to test their interpretations and conclusions with the participants. The second interview also gave me the opportunity to make comments and ask questions that emerged after the first interview as well as questions and comments that might have surfaced in other interviews with other participants. In the second set of interviews, the participants were also given the opportunity to ask questions and make comments that they may not have had the chance to ask during the first interview. Furthermore, the second interviews allowed participants to elaborate on their ideas, opinions, and experiences shared during the first interviews as well as provide any necessary clarifications. The interviews were audiotaped, and tapes transcribed. Finally, the transcripts were coded and analyzed.

Fieldnotes

In this study, secondary data were collected through fieldnotes in which I recorded significant events that took place. Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw (2001) state: "Some field researchers consider fieldnotes to be writings that record both what they learn and observe about the activities of others and their own actions, questions and reflections" (p. 354). I recorded fieldnotes to document aspects of the interview that could not be represented on the audiotape such as my thoughts, reflections, and observations of body language and facial expressions. Fieldnotes were not recorded during the interview as I felt that it could have distracted the participants during the interviews. Emerson et al. suggest taking mental notes and recording fieldnotes immediately after the interview to make certain that all important details of the

encounter are recorded and interpreted. In this study, I recorded fieldnotes before and after the interview in an attempt to capture the important details.

Research Journal

In addition to the fieldnotes, I also collected secondary data through a reflexive journal. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the reflexive journal consists of three separate parts: the daily schedule and logistics of the study, a personal diary, and a methodological log. In my reflexive journal, I recorded my thoughts, beliefs, and interpretations about the primary data collected and research process, and I also reflected on the methodological decisions I made as well as the reasons for making them.

Ministry Documents

Documents created by the Ministry of Education (2007a, 2007b, 2007c) pertaining to English language learners were also analyzed. These documents include curriculum and policy that have recently been released to assist educators in accommodating English language learners in their new learning environments. The documents provide information on the programs, practices, and procedures that should be put in place to meet the needs of these learners, and they also provide information about the education system for these new families. Through content analysis, I examined the ways the documents portray parental involvement.

Analysis

After the first set of in-depth interviews, I transcribed the tapes and wrote a synopsis of my interpretations of the conversations. Researchers discuss many of the challenges they face during the transcription process. Roulston, deMarrais, and Lewis

(2003) describe a researcher's struggle in transcribing an interview with a participant whose first language is not English. Based on my participants' level of English proficiency, I experienced some difficulty in transcribing the interviews. During the member-check process, I was able to clarify and sort out any uncertainties or misinterpretations from the conversations.

Lapadat and Lindsay (1999) discuss the many decisions that researchers make regarding what is being transcribed and how it is being transcribed. Examples of decisions that need to be made involve whether or not "paralinguistic and nonverbal information should be included, and what conventions should be used to symbolize or present it" (p. 67). Throughout the transcription process, I noted the decisions I made regarding transcription in my research journal. In this study, I provide a list of conventions that I chose to use throughout the transcription process (See Appendix C).

I continued the analysis by coding the data once the interviews had been transcribed. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) describe coding as organizing and managing the most meaningful bits of data by assigning tags or labels to the data. I began the coding process by compiling a list of a priori codes using research literature on parental involvement along with interview questions. A list of all a priori codes is included in the study (See Appendix D). When coding the transcripts, fieldnotes and research journal, the a priori codes were listed in the right-hand margin, and the codes that emerged after reading the transcripts were documented in the left-hand margin. After the coding process was complete, I continued the analysis by altering the codes when necessary and looking for overall patterns and themes that emerged. The second sets of interviews were coded and analyzed using the same process.

Trustworthiness of Data

As previously mentioned, the second set of interviews took place for the purpose of member-checking. The member-check was essential to give participants the opportunity to react to the data in order to establish credibility and trustworthiness. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), "building trust is a time-consuming process; moreover, trust can be destroyed in an instant and then take even more time to rebuild" (p. 303). By giving participants the opportunity to examine and further clarify the data collected, I was able to strengthen the mutual trust and build an informed representation of their experiences.

Ethical Considerations

Before I began my research, I obtained permission to conduct the study from Brock University Research Ethics Board (See Appendix E). To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms have been assigned to 3 of the participants throughout the study. As mentioned in the participant profile, my parents agreed to have their first names used in the study, and this agreement was indicated on the consent form prior to signing the document. In addition, data have been kept secure in my personal research files and member-checking has been a continuous process throughout the study. I asked the participants to verify my interpretations and conclusions, and I also asked for clarification of any questions or concerns to ensure that my findings are representative of their experiences.

Challenges in Data Collection and Analysis

Earlier in this chapter, I described myself as a partial insider (Sherif, 2001) based on my personal and professional experiences. My status as a partial insider has

definitely had an impact on my perception of ethnic minority parents in education. Based on my experiences as a secondary ESL teacher, I have noticed particular patterns in terms of ethnic minority parents' involvement at the school and I have been exposed to various stereotypes, attitudes, beliefs, and generalizations that emerge from deficit thinking. Throughout this study, I have made a conscious effort to be extremely sensitive to the influence these attitudes, beliefs, and opinions might have had on my understanding of parental involvement of ethnic minority parents. I found it necessary to make this conscious effort so that I could avoid superimposing theories and generalizations onto the lives of my participants. In spite of my personal and professional experiences with ethnic minority parents, I had to consciously let the participants speak for themselves in order to understand their experiences and not overly influence their discussions in any way.

The interview process became somewhat challenging when I encountered some unforeseen participant behaviours. Roulston et al. (2003) discuss the experiences of a group of novice interviewers that encounter some unexpected participant behaviours. They describe these unexpected behaviours as consisting of "being late to the meeting, eating during the interview, having to interview in a noisy room (complete with children watching cartoons on television), and in one case a dog barking in the background" (p. 649). Some of the unanticipated participant behaviours I experienced reflect the unexpected behaviours described by Roulston et al. and they definitely created some challenges for me as a novice interviewer. I found my first interview with Pat to be somewhat challenging. Throughout most of the interview, I found it difficult to concentrate on our discussion regarding parental involvement in education. The

interview took place in his kitchen while the rest of his family gathered in the family room close by. In my fieldnotes, I noted the constant loud chatter, music, and phone ringing that was occurring prior to the interview.

> *I'm conducting the interview at Pat's house in his kitchen. The house is quite noisy. There seem to be many distractions. There are people around, the television is on, people are talking, music is playing. This may affect my ability to focus on our conversation. (Journal Entry, June 30, 2008, p. 20)*

Due to the distractions described above, I feel that I was unable to effectively listen, ask questions, and comment on some of the issues Pat discussed. As a result, our interview was cut short because I could not focus on using probes to further investigate Pat's experiences and understandings. Fortunately, I had the opportunity to conduct a second interview with Pat. In this interview, I was able to clarify some of my misunderstandings as well as ask the questions that I did not get the opportunity to ask in the previous interview.

In my interview with Filippo (my father), I found it challenging at times to clearly understand his answers, comments, and opinions because unfortunately he had been battling a severe case of laryngitis for a couple of months. I waited a few weeks hoping that his condition would improve, but Filippo informed me that his case was severe and it could take months before his voice was back to normal again. After a few weeks of waiting, Filippo and I decided to proceed with the interview despite his condition. Before I began the actual interview, I recall being concerned about his inability to express himself clearly.

> *He's had laryngitis for over 2 months so it may be difficult to hear him clearly on tape. I'm kind of worried about what he's going to sound like. I should probably tape the first few minutes and then check to see what he sounds like on tape. (Journal Entry, July 18, 2008, p. 24)*

Fortunately, the first few minutes of the interview sounded somewhat clear, so I proceeded with the rest of the interview hoping that the rest of our conversation would turn out to be just as audible. Luckily, when I listened to the audiotape after our interview, the majority of our conversation was comprehensible in spite of his raspy voice and frequent coughing. Once again, a second interview was a time I could revisit some of my uncertainties, and it also gave Filippo the opportunity to elaborate on some of his ideas and stories.

In addition to the participants' unexpected behaviours throughout the interview process, I found that some of my personal life experiences and everyday behaviours affected the flow of the interview process as well. Fontana and Frey (2000) explain that "even in the most structured interview, not every contingency can be anticipated and not every interviewer behaves according to script" (p. 702). To begin, I originally started with 6 participants that were eager and willing to participate in this study. The list of participants initially consisted of Ida and Filippo and the 4 participants that I recruited from the adult education center. Once I scheduled an interview date, time, and location with each of the 6 participants, I felt confident and eager to begin my first set of interviews.

> *I finally feel as if things are falling into place. I was so worried about finding participants and being able to find a time and place that is suitable for us to meet. Now that that's all settled, I am ready to begin my interviews. (Journal Entry, June 9, 2008, p. 14)*

Unfortunately, the process did not go as "smoothly" as I initially envisioned it. After having completed my interviews with 2 of my participants, I fell ill and I was hospitalized for a week. I spent an additional 10 days at home in recovery after having minor surgery. I was left with no choice but to reschedule the times and dates of the

interviews with the remaining 4 participants. In spite of my fear of disappointing the participants, I felt it was in my best interest to phone the participants personally from my hospital bed in order to ensure that the good rapport I had established with each of them was maintained (Sherif, 2001). As a result of my illness, I was unable to interview the sixth participant, as she had already made prior arrangements to leave for Korea for several weeks. Fortunately, the participant understood my situation and she offered to participate in any future studies that I may wish to pursue.

Similar to the novice interviewers' experiences in Roulston et al.'s (2003) study, I also recognized the need to talk less when conducting interviews. During my first interview with Ida (my mom), I realized that I interrupted her a few times while she was talking. After having listened to our conversation on tape, I also noted my tendency to finish Ida's sentences whenever she paused to think about how to word her thoughts and opinions in English.

> *I realize that I probably should have given her some time to think about her answers after my questions instead of jumping in immediately and guessing what she wanted to say. This totally could have influenced her answers. Perhaps for the next interview, I should try rewording the questions if she doesn't understand them and maybe I can even stop the tape if she needs a moment to think through what she is trying to say. (Journal Entry, June 18, 2008, p. 16)*

Thankfully, I recognized this behaviour after my very first interview with Ida, and I realized that it was probably related to the fact that I am her daughter. I felt a strong connection to her experiences and I was able to recall some of her past stories, so I instinctively tried to complete her sentences when she showed signs of struggle in her attempts to express herself clearly. I was able to make a conscious effort to limit my interruptions in my second interview with Ida as well as the rest of the interviews that followed.

Although I made a conscious effort to leave the talking to the participants, there were many instances in which I felt "a strong urge to join in the conversation" (Harrison, MacGibbon, & Morton, 2001). I particularly experienced this urge when I interviewed my parents. I found it challenging to listen to their stories, ideas, and opinions without adding my own perception of the events that took place during my childhood and adolescence. I believe that my parents found it equally challenging to discuss and share their experiences without asking me for my opinions or my perceptions. I was unsure as to whether or not my input would hinder or help the results, so I decided to play it safe and refrain from contributing my views and opinions to the conversations. There was one instance in which my mother asked me about my opinion regarding her involvement throughout my years of schooling. I noted my reaction in my research journal.

> *My mom asked me whether or not I think she was involved enough in my secondary education. I knew I wasn't supposed to answer any questions that could possibly affect her thoughts and opinions about the issue so I simply explained to her that my opinion was irrelevant because I really wanted to know about her thoughts, opinions, and experiences. She was really good about it. (Journal Entry, June 18, 2008, p. 17)*

After having interviewed my mother, I returned to the literature on interviewing to review whether or not my reaction to my mother's questioning was appropriate. Fontana and Frey (2000) confirm that "the researcher should avoid getting involved in a 'real' conversation in which he or she answers questions asked by the respondent or provides personal opinions on the matters discussed" (p. 713). I realized that my relationship with my parents could be problematic during the interviews because of their natural tendency to question and my inclination to answer; however, I made it clear to my parents that my role as an interviewer was to see the situation from their

viewpoint rather than superimposing any preconceptions that could potentially influence their responses.

After my interviews with my first two participants (Ida and Pat), I recognized that my interviews were not exactly taking the form of a natural, relaxing conversation. I found that I was concentrating too much on making sure that I asked every question on the interview schedule, and I was not putting forth enough effort to ensure that I was creating a comfortable environment in which the participants and I could engage in an open-ended conversation regarding their experiences as ethnic minority parents. According to Roulston et al. (2003), "when the participant is able to see the interview as a conversation, they will begin to relax and share and not worry about only giving information" (p. 653). Perhaps if I had treated my interview with Ida as more of a conversation, she would not have felt as nervous about her answers and her level of English proficiency. I noted her nervousness after our first interview.

> *She seemed really nervous especially at the beginning of the interview. She kept looking down at the interview schedule I gave her last week. Perhaps I should have told her not to worry about the questions and that I would only use them to guide our conversation. I think I was a little too structured right from the beginning when I started right into the questioning. Perhaps in the beginning, I could have engaged in some small talk as I casually hit the record button on the tape recorder. (Journal Entry, June 10, 2008, p. 16)*

After noting Ida's nervousness, I returned to the literature on interviewing, and I reminded myself of the fact that an interview is a social interaction that can be influenced by the social context in which it takes place (Fontana & Frey, 2000). After my first two interviews with Ida and Pat, I made a mental note reminding myself to ensure that I create a comfortable and casual environment in my next interviews.

My first interview with Pat probably would not have been as short as it was if I had steered away from my questions from time to time, and actually built some conversation and questioning around his thoughts, opinions, and stories. According to Roulston et al. (2003), using probes to extend an interview can be challenging for some interviewers. I realized that in my interviews with Ida and Pat I had the tendency to accept their responses and move directly to the next question rather than ask for elaborations or clarifications of meaning. I often hesitated to use probes because I feared getting off topic. After my interviews with Ida and Pat, I realized that using probes to extend an interview could actually help me gain some insight on other interesting issues regarding my research interests. If there is one thing that I learned in my experiences as a novice interviewer, it is that interview skills take time to develop, and I definitely noticed an improvement after each interview experience.

Prior to conducting my first interview, I anticipated some challenges in understanding my participants' conversations due to their lack of English proficiency. Surprisingly, I experienced little difficulty in understanding their thoughts, opinions, and stories. I attribute my ability to easily comprehend English spoken by non-native speakers to my daily exposure to English language learners at home and at work. Although I did not find it as challenging to understand my participants during the actual interviews, I did however struggle at various points throughout the transcription process. Based on my personal experiences as a teacher of ESL students, it is less challenging for listeners to comprehend English language learners if they are physically present in conversations. Listeners can more easily interpret their messages when they see body language, facial expressions, and also the movement of their lips.

Unfortunately, as I listened to the recordings of the interviews, there were several instances in which I struggled to fully understand particular words and phrases. I decided it was in my best interest to choose a convention that would indicate my inability to understand specific parts of the conversation. I chose to place brackets around the words and phrases that seemed unclear to me. By employing this convention throughout the transcripts, I was able to clarify the information with the participants during the process of member-checking. I noted the effectiveness of this convention after my second sets of interviews with Ida and Filippo.

> *I'm actually really glad that I clearly indicated some of my difficulties in understanding specific words and phrases in the transcripts. My mother's accent in some areas was difficult to make out. I struggled a bit with my father's transcript not only because of his accent, but his laryngitis made it a bit more difficult. Thankfully, I had the opportunity to clarify any uncertainties I had during the second interviews. My parents were great in helping me revisit some of my misinterpretations. (Journal Entry, September 8, 200, p. 42)*

The transcription process is more than just the process of recording conversation on paper. As a novice interviewer, I learned that selecting appropriate conventions and deciding on which sounds, expressions, pauses, and body language should be included in the transcript are just as important as the conversation itself (See Appendix C).

After my first interview with Ida, I decided I would correct the grammatical errors she made throughout the interview on the transcript. When I began to transcribe the interview, I realized that correcting each grammatical error would not only be time-consuming, but it also could affect the intended message Ida was trying to transmit. Lapadat and Lindsay (1999) indicate that the "quality of transcripts can be adversely affected by deliberate, accidental, and unavoidable alterations of the data" (p. 75). After having transcribed the first 10 minutes of Ida's interview, I realized that I had

been completely altering the data. In order to ensure trustworthiness, I decided to transcribe the interview word for word and then to approach the participants for any clarification during the member checks.

The analysis of the data collected seemed somewhat arduous. When I began coding the data, I found it challenging to select specific labels or categories that best represented various words, phrases, and paragraphs throughout the transcripts. I found myself constantly going back to each transcript to add, take away, and relabel chunks of data. I initially believed that the coding and analysis of data were two separate processes in qualitative research; however, as I continued the coding process, I realized that by coding the data, I was subconsciously looking for patterns and differences amongst the participants' accounts of their experiences.

> *Filippo is the third participant that I've interviewed. I'm in the process of coding the data from our second interview together, and only now have I realized that all along I have been coding the data from each of my interviews based on the similarities and differences amongst the interviews. I can already start to organize the data in my mind in such a way that I can easily explain what is common about my participants' experiences as ethnic minority parents and what is unique about each of their experiences. (Journal Entry, July 26, 2008, p. 27)*

Although the coding process facilitated the organization of the data in my mind, I struggled to find a way to display and organize the codes from each interview in such a way that would assist me in the writing of the analysis without having to shuffle through hundreds of pages of coded data. After several attempts to create tables and charts using various word processors, I decided to return to the literature on qualitative research. I read Basit's (2003) article regarding the coding of qualitative data, and I noted her step-by-step explanation on how to display and organize data in a matrix. Based on Basit's model, I created a matrix in which I inscribed the interviewee's

pseudonyms vertically down the first column and the a priori codes horizontally along the top row. I then recorded the emergent codes from each participant's interviews in the corresponding squares (See Appendix D). Once the matrix was completed, I highlighted various patterns across the matrix in one colour, and I highlighted specific pieces of data that seemed interesting or surprising to me in another colour. After countless hours of reading, organizing, labelling, and rearranging pieces of data, I felt ready and eager to begin writing about the analysis and my findings.

My original plan of research included a focus group in which the participants of the study would have the opportunity to meet one another and share their stories. By meeting as a group, I thought that the participants could learn about the various ways that parents are involved in their children's education and perhaps they could further reinforce to one another the importance of strengthening the ties between schools and ethnic minority parents. My plan was to act as a facilitator and begin the meeting by reviewing my purpose in conducting this study and then briefly reviewing some of the patterns that emerged from the interviews. I intended to give the group as much control as possible during the course of their discussion so that they could share their experiences in their children's education if they wished and perhaps come up with additional strategies and techniques that could be implemented by schools in order to improve communication between educators and ethnic minority parents.

Organizing the focus group was much more difficult than I had previously imagined. Finding a location that all participants agreed on was not a problem because they all were willing to meet at my house because it was reasonably accessible to each of them. Finding a date and time to facilitate this focus group was definitely the biggest

challenge. My parents (Ida and Filippo) were originally available to meet on evenings and weekends; however their availability became limited when they decided to book a last-minute trip to Europe for 2 weeks. Pat, Anthony, and Rose were no longer studying English at the adult education center in the evenings since the school had closed for the month of August, but their evenings were now consumed with taking care of the children and other household responsibilities that they were unable to tend to during their time at school. Based on my inability to set a specific date and time that was suitable for all participants, I was not able to conduct this focus group.

Boundaries and Limitations of the Study

Each participant in this study is a non-native speaker of the English language. The fact that the participants did not use their mother tongue to discuss their experiences, perceptions, and opinions might have had an influence on what experiences, perceptions, and opinions they chose to share throughout the interviews as well as how they chose to share them. My intentions are not to place blame on the language barrier for any difficulties or challenges the participants experienced throughout the interview; however, as an experienced second language learner, I recognize that language can influence the depth of a conversation. Years ago, I studied French for several months in Quebec City, and I can remember that at times I hesitated to express certain details in my conversations with the francophones as a result of my fear of not being able to express myself clearly and correctly. There are numerous studies that demonstrate the difficulties and challenges that adults face in second language acquisition. Munro and Derwing (2008) discuss the struggles that adults experience in trying to acquire proper pronunciation during second language

acquisition. Montrul, Foote, and Perpinan (2008) explain that "complete second language acquisition is not guaranteed in adulthood" (p. 504). Ida and Filippo exhibited their apprehension in having their English recorded for they feared being misunderstood or ridiculed by those listening.

> *Before the interview, Ida asked me if anyone else was going to listen to the audiotape. She felt self-conscious about someone listening to the audiotape and hearing her errors in grammar and pronunciation. (Journal Entry, June 10, 2008, p. 14)*
>
> *Filippo made a lot of notes prior to the interview because he said it would help him remember everything he wanted to talk about and it would help him remember how to say things in English so he wouldn't make mistakes and sound silly on tape. (Journal Entry, July 18, 2008, p. 24)*

It is possible that the participants' lack of English proficiency might have influenced the depth of their discussions. If the participants were given the opportunity to share their experiences, perceptions, and opinions in their first languages, perhaps their accounts might have been richer. If I were to interview the same participants in the future, I would conduct my interviews with my parents in Italian since I am fluent and able to read and write in the language. I would also consider having Rose respond in Spanish whenever she struggled to express herself in English since my understanding of the Spanish language is somewhat strong. I truly believe that allowing the participants to discuss their understanding of parental involvement in education in their first languages would definitely add to the richness of the data.

Four out of 5 of the participants are of European background, and 1 participant originates from South America. Although the accounts of the participants' experiences reflect some definite patterns, it would be foolhardy to assume that these patterns would be replicated across all ethnic minority parents. For example, parents who are visible minorities may experience racism in their interactions with their children's

schools and teachers who are majority white, while those parents who reflect the white majority teachers, in terms of racial identity, may not experience marginalization based on skin color. Including additional participants representative of greater diversity would have provided the opportunity to hear voices that cut across multiple differences.

Some Final Thoughts

As I scan through Chapter Three on my computer screen, I see that I have provided readers with a detailed description of the methodology of my research. I identified myself and outlined my goals as a qualitative researcher. I continued the chapter offering a detailed description of each of the participants so that readers are aware of their backgrounds. Next, I outlined the steps taken in the data collection and I described my process in conducting the analysis. I also included some ethical concerns, as well as a brief discussion on the trustworthiness of the data. I also acknowledged the complexity of the data collection and analysis, and I described some of the boundaries and limitations of the study. It is now time to invite the reader to move to Chapter Four to learn about ethnic minority parents and their experiences in their children's education.

CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS

In this chapter, I offer a detailed description of the recurring themes in the participants' discussions regarding their involvement in their children's education. The themes are as follows: Informal Activities as Involvement, Dependence on Relatives and Children, Involvement at the Elementary Level Versus Involvement at the Secondary Level, The Language Barrier as a Challenge, and Strengthening Ties Between Schools and Ethnic Minority Parents. In addition, I provide a detailed analysis of two current documents released by the Ontario Ministry of Education to exhibit the efforts of the ministry in accommodating the needs of ethnic minority parents in Ontario schools today.

Informal Activities as Involvement

A unifying theme is the participants' understanding of their involvement in their children's education through various informal activities from the home. All 5 participants describe their involvement in terms of the care, concern, and emotional support they provide their children as they strive to succeed academically. My parents describe parental involvement in education in terms of nurturing their children at home. My mother believes that true parental involvement consists of preparing children for their day at school. G. Lopez et al. (2001) explain that unlike ethnic minority parents, parents of the dominant culture describe their involvement as consisting of more traditional or formal practices, such as participation in parent advisory committees and working with their children on academic tasks at home. Through their study, they found that ethnic minorities "view their contributions to school success in terms of informal activities such as provoking nurturance, instilling cultural values, talking with

their children, sending them to school clean and rested, checking homework, and a variety of other non-traditional activities" (p. 256). My mother describes her understanding of her personal involvement in a similar manner.

> *Sofia: Okay . . . um . . . how do you think parents should be involved? Like what kinds of things should they do to be involved?*
>
> *Ida: Well . . . um . . . get up in the morning, make them breakfast, let them dress up, get ready, bring them to the school bus, give them lunch, make sure they be happy at school, and . . . that's it. (Interview, June 10, 2008. p. 1)*

In my personal research journal, I noted my mother's body language. Her tone of voice indicated that she is sure of her involvement in education as consisting of the nurturance she provided her children during their years of schooling (Journal Entry, June 10, 2008, p. 16). My father also refers to preparing his children for school in his description of parental involvement.

> *Filippo: When they get up in the morning . . . parents should go do things like make breakfast and make lunch and make sure they are ready for school. If the kids take the bus then they should go to the bus with them, if they need to drive or walk, parents should go with them. (Interview, July 18, 2008, p. 3)*

My parents' understanding of their involvement in some ways reflects Pushor's (2007) description of parental involvement. In discussing their involvement, my mother and father explain that they visited the school when contact was initiated by the school, such as at parent-teacher interviews. They do not emphasize the need to be physically present at the school to be considered an involved parent. Their participation does not reflect Pushor's explanation of parent engagement. My mother and father were neither involved in sharing their knowledge, experiences, and skills with the teachers at school, nor were they involved in helping to develop programs and policies. They demonstrate that informal activities, such as nurturing children, are a necessary step in ensuring that children succeed in school. As a child, I did not consider my parents' nurturance as a

form of their involvement in my schooling; however, I now realize how important and influential their care and concern were to my learning. Their nurturance allowed me to feel comfortable and secure in the school environment, and it influenced my ability to learn and achieve my best socially and academically.

Similar to the experiences of the participants in Auerbach's (2007) study of Latino immigrant parents in schools, all 5 participants in this study discuss the emotional support they offer their children as they attempt to achieve success in school and the discussions they have regarding the importance of education. Filippo, Pat, and Anthony describe their involvement in terms of the emphasis they place on education in the home. In discussing their understanding of their involvement, Filippo and Pat mention that they often stress the importance of education and academic success.

> *Filippo: I think school is important. I always tell them they have to do good in school and that school is the most important thing for them. (Interview, July 18, 2008, p. 12)*

> *Pat: I push them as hard as possible and keep mentioning to them it's very important. (Interview, June 30, 2008, p. 2)*

Regardless of their challenges to fully participate in all aspects of their children's education, the participants demonstrate that their children are doing well in terms of their academics, behaviours, and attitudes towards education. In spite of their self-consciousness and insecurities about their involvement in their children's education, Pat, Anthony, and Rose attribute their children's success to the value they place on schooling in the home.

> *Pat: They good kids and they know I think school is important and I always encourage and show them. (Interview, July 7, 2008, p. 4)*
> *Anthony: Yah they do good because I think the important thing is that you show your kids that school is important and that you teach them . . . like . . . you show them...values. (Interview, July 31, 2008, p. 6)*

Rose: Yah . . . like they're good . . . very good. They're good because we tell them school is important so they know . . . (Interview, August 27, 2008, p. 4)

Although my parents did not discuss their children's academic success during the interview, I know my parents perceive their children as having been successful in school due to conversations we have had in the past. Throughout my years of schooling, I always attributed my excellent marks to the fact that I worked hard and had to assume the responsibility of most educational concerns as a result of my parents' limited English and unfamiliarity with the school system. After having explored the participants' experiences, I now realize that my academic success is not only the result of my hard work, but it is also attributable to the value placed on education in my home by my parents. Even though valuing education in the home may not always influence the academic success of children, the participants' emphasis on education is significant because it indicates their interest and concern for their children's achievement.

In addition to emphasizing the importance of education in the home, Pat continues to offer moral support to his daughter by showing her affection and praise in times of academic success.

Pat: So every time she come home if she got a test she tell me and then I give her encouragement and I give her a hug and a kiss. (Interview, June 30, 2008, p. 3)

Anthony also refers to encouragement in describing his involvement in his children's education; however, his encouragement is not described as physical affection and verbal praise. Anthony uses the word "push" to describe his form of encouragement.

Anthony: For sure. I'm involved because I show I care and I push them to care and I push them to be good, to do good and I push them to do everything possible to get help and have lots of success. (Interview, July 27, 2008, p. 7)

Filippo, Pat, and Anthony believe that they are involved in their children's education because they provide their children with encouragement. By getting involved in informal activities such as emphasizing the importance of education and pushing them to succeed, Filippo, Pat, and Anthony demonstrate to their children that they are involved and definitely interested in their educational experiences.

Filippo, Anthony, and Rose explain that their personal involvement in their children's education involves asking their children questions about their progress at school. In addition to talking about children's academic progress, Anthony emphasizes the importance of talking to children so that parents are aware of their children's behaviour or perhaps any problems their children are experiencing in school.

> *Anthony: I think the important thing is to talk to children about school...like parents should talk about things like what the kids do at school . . . at home I always ask them if school is good, if they are good, if they have problems . . . things like that. (Interview, July 27, 2008, p. 2)*

Rose also understands her personal involvement in terms of the conversations she has with her daughter about school. Rose explains that her daughter often talks to her and her husband about her progress because she is aware that her parents want her to be successful in the future.

> *Rose: She always talks to us about if she does good or bad and we ask her too. We want to know because we want for them to have a good future. It's important for me and my husband. We make sure she knows it's important. (Interview, August 7, 2008. p. 6)*

The participants engage in conversations with their children so that they remain informed about their children's academic progress, behaviour, and future plans. A simple, informal activity such as holding a conversation with children at home might not be viewed as high parental involvement (Vincent & Martin, 2000) or parent engagement (Pushor, 2007) by those outside the home; however, Filippo, Anthony, and

Rose believe that they are well-informed about their children's education because they ask their children questions and hold short, informal conversations about their schooling.

In discussing their involvement, the participants also demonstrate that gender plays a significant role in the informal activities they perceive as parental involvement in education. The female participants, Ida and Rose, describe their involvement in terms of the affection, care, and concern they show their children. My mother ensured that her children were fed, dressed, and happy before sending them off to school. Rose indicates that she talks to her children and asks them questions to ensure that she is aware of their progress and other educational issues. The male participants, Filippo, Pat, and Anthony, also understand their involvement in terms of informal activities; however, it is not as apparent that their involvement involves accessing their emotional capital in the same way the female participants described. The male participants' focus seems to be more on emphasizing the importance of education for their children's futures and to ensure their children behave appropriately at school. Gillies (2006) highlights the gendered division of emotional labour in ethnic minority families, making apparent the differential efforts of mothers and fathers. The study demonstrates that "while fathers may be highly committed and emotionally invested in their children, mothers still take primary responsibility for the emotion work associated with day-to-day caring" (p. 284). Of course, my intention is not to create stereotypes regarding male and female emotional support; however, the female participants in this study, Ida and Rose, demonstrate that their involvement in their children's education entails using their emotions as resources in ensuring that their children are protected, progressing,

and achieving in school. The data do not indicate that the male participants do not support their children emotionally throughout their schooling; however, their accounts of their experiences indicate that their involvement consists of less emotional support than the female participants of the study.

The 5 participants in this study believe that they are involved parents in the educational experiences of their children, and they perceive their involvement as consisting of informal activities such as nurturance, encouragement, emotional support, and talk. As opposed to participating in traditional activities such as visiting the school for meetings, conferences, and other school events, the participants draw on their inner resources, which Auerbach (2007) refers to as *moral capital*. Auerbach connects the concept of moral capital to Yosso's (2005) model of *community cultural wealth* because a family's moral capital consists of cultural values that are transmitted within a family. By recognizing that some ethnic minority parents employ their moral capital to promote their children's persistence and resilience in school, educators may reconsider their deficit views of ethnic minority parents as being uninterested and uninvolved and revaluate their strategies and approaches in ensuring student success.

Dependence on Relatives and Children

In all the interviews, I made sure to ask each participant about who they turn to in times of doubt, confusion, and frustration as ethnic minority parents in an unfamiliar education system. Similar to the experiences of the immigrant parents in Martinez-Cosio and Iannacone's (2007) study, all participants explain that they depend on either a relative or their children to support them in their attempts to fulfill their roles as involved parents in their children's education. When the participants describe their

involvement in their children's education, they demonstrate that an integral aspect of their involvement either at home or in the school consists of depending on their relatives and children for explanations of school policies, procedures, and information regarding their children's progress.

Both my father and Rose discuss their dependence on relatives in times of confusion or concern with their children's schooling. My father refers to his dependence on his niece when he struggled with understanding the school system as a new immigrant.

> *Filippo: Sometimes I ask my niece because she is older and she already finish high school so she help to explain to me the situation. (Interview, July 18, 2008, p. 8)*

My father relied on his niece to answer his questions and explain unfamiliar procedures since she was experienced and old enough to understand the complexities of the system. He also mentions that he was not able to help me with my homework, especially in the higher grades; however, he still felt involved because he always made an effort to encourage me to seek assistance from relatives.

> *Filippo: I always tell you to ask your cousin for help because we could not help you . . . you also have the other cousin who is very good in math and now he's a math teacher so when you was small, you always asked him because he was older. (Interview, July 18, 2008, p. 10)*

As a child, I remember my father telling me that he was unable to offer me assistance with my homework, and I recall him often encouraging me to seek help from my relatives. At that time, I did not consider my father as being involved in my learning because of his hesitation to provide me with help. I now realize that when he encouraged me to seek assistance, he definitely was involved in my learning. Although my father felt that he could not personally help me with my homework, he

demonstrated his involvement by using his family network to ensure that I had the opportunity to succeed academically.

Rose's involvement in her daughters' education consists of relying on family as well. She talks about visiting the elementary school for parent-teacher interviews along with her husband and her cousin.

> *Rose: Me and my husband went with my cousin sometimes because my cousin understands better English. (Interview, August 7, 2008, p. 3)*

Rose felt self-conscious visiting her daughters' elementary school due to her lack of English proficiency; therefore, she depends on her cousin to interpret and translate information during parent-teacher interviews so that she is aware of her daughters' progress. By employing their family networks to help them understand the unfamiliar education system and assist their children to succeed academically, both Filippo (my father) and Rose demonstrate an interest in their children's education. Yosso (2005) incorporates *familial capital* into his model of community cultural wealth to demonstrate how ethnic minorities use their family networks to nurture knowledge. It is evident that Filippo and Rose utilize this form of capital to become involved parents in their children's education; however, educators and parents of the dominant culture may not recognize the use of familial capital as a form of parental involvement in education.

All participants, including my parents, Filippo and Ida, refer to their dependence on their children to help them understand and get to know the policies and procedures of the new school system. In his description of his involvement, my father acknowledges the fact that he depended on me, his oldest child, to explain school procedures to him, to talk to him about my progress, and to inform him of the progress of my two younger brothers. My father admits that I was aware of my parents' lack of

knowledge of the school system and English language, especially in their early years as recent immigrant parents in the Ontario school system. As a result of his lack of knowledge and understanding, my father explains that I grew up feeling compelled to provide him with important information regarding my schooling.

> *Filippo: You understand that we didn't know the language too much and we didn't understand how . . . how people do things in this country so you always had to find information and explain to us how things work . . . and if we didn't understand a letter that came to the house about the school or about the report cards we always make you read and explain better to us. (Interview, July 18, 2008, p. 10)*

My father adds that he not only depended on me to inform him of school procedures, events, and my academic progress, but he also relied on me to provide my younger brothers with the guidance and assistance he could not offer them in their schooling due to the language barrier and his lack of familiarity with the Ontario curriculum and system.

> *Filippo: We ask you to help them with homework because we know you understand better and we know you learn the stuff already. We feel more comfortable with you to help them. (Interview, July 18, 2008, p. 10)*

My mother also makes reference to her lack of English proficiency and knowledge of the Ontario school system. I asked her if she remembers ever offering the schools any ideas or opinions she might have had regarding school practices and procedures. As mentioned in my research journal (Journal Entry, June 23, 2008, p. 17), my mother answered my question with a tone of insecurity.

> *Ida: Not really . . . no. Even if I have an idea, I was not too comfortable to speak with my English so I no even try. Yah I don't even know too much about the system in Canada so I decide not to. I just get information from my kids. (June 23, 2008, p. 3)*

It seems as though my mother felt that her ideas and opinions would be of no value to the school since she came from another country, lacked proficiency in English, and was

unfamiliar with the school system. She believed that the best way to stay involved in her children's education was to seek important information from her children.

I clearly remember my parents relying on me to help them understand letters, instructions, and other important information, and I recall them often encouraging me to help my brothers with their homework. At times, I was eager and willing to help, but I can recall instances when I felt pressured and irritated because I sometimes spent so much time by their sides as their interpreters, as opposed to spending time with my friends, getting involved in leisure activities, and doing homework. These feelings of pressure and irritation were a result of my immaturity as a young child and adolescent. After having listened to my parents' experiences, I have come to understand that my parents needed me almost as much as I needed them to get through various stages of life.

Pat also discusses his dependence on his older children to assist his younger daughter in high school with homework. His reasons for depending on his older children to provide homework assistance reflect my parents' insecurities in understanding the language and being able to express their knowledge clearly. In addition to the language barrier that inhibits his homework involvement, Pat is also hesitant about offering his daughter help because he says he is unfamiliar with some of the material taught in school.

> *Pat: Like for homework I couldn't help all the time because I didn't know some of the things they learn here . . . like my youngest daughter she always go to her older brother and sister. (Interview, July 7, 2008, p. 3)*

In addition to depending on his children to assist each other with their homework, Pat also relies on them to explain the school system to him, just as my parents expected of me. Pat acknowledges the fact that involvement was definitely more of a challenge as a

recent newcomer because he was sending his children to a completely unfamiliar school system and his lack of English proficiency did not allow him to seek any explanations of the policies, procedures, and programs in place. He admits that his involvement and his understanding of the system, have improved now that his children are old enough to understand the system and explain it to him; however, he does not attribute his understanding to the school providing him with more support than in the past.

> *Pat: Well I understand more now . . . but before . . . when my oldest kids were young . . . I didn't understand too much because nobody explain to me...but now I have more experience . . . my kids explain lots to me. (Interview, July 7, 2008, p. 4)*

Rose's dependence on her children is similar to that of Pat's. Rose initially depended on her cousin to inform her of her daughters' progress in school while her daughters were at the elementary level because her daughters were unable to effectively communicate in English at that time. Once the girls reached the secondary level, Rose felt her daughters were proficient in English and old enough to keep their mother in tune with their progress, school events, and explanations of school procedures.

> *Rose: ...the girls are big in high school and so if the school sends a letter to us, they read the letter and explain to us the letter. (Interview, August 7, 2008. p. 10)*

Like Pat, Rose finds comfort in knowing that her daughters are experienced and old enough to keep her informed of their schooling and involved in their educational experiences.

In my interview with Anthony, I asked him whether or not he offers his children advice or opinions regarding the courses they should be taking in high school or perhaps the plans they have for postsecondary. He admits that he cannot offer his

children such advice or opinions because he attended high school in his home country and he is therefore unfamiliar with the system in Ontario secondary schools.

> *Anthony: He has to do what he likes and I can't really tell him what to do because . . . because things are different and . . . so I never went to high school in Canada. I just trust that he knows what he has to do. (Interview, July 27, 2008, p. 7)*

Through this discussion, I realize that Anthony depends on his children to take control of their education and to know what is best for their futures. Similar to the others' experiences, Anthony relies on his children to keep him informed and involved because he feels that his unfamiliarity with the school system inhibits his contact with the school.

Apart from being dependent on relatives and children, my mother talks of her dependence on my father. Spousal dependence is not a recurring theme among the interviews; however, I choose to discuss my mother's dependence on my father because it reflects the notion of spousal dependence depicted in literature. Young and McGeeney (1968) conducted a study on ethnic minorities and their involvement in education approximately 40 years ago. They found that in some households many women left the talking and decision making to the men because of their inability to speak English and because some women felt that education was not a woman's business. The attitude and inferiority that some of the women demonstrated in Young and McGeeney's study is obviously indicative of the time period in which the study was conducted; however, these attitudes regarding women's dependence may continue to reside in male-dominating families today. When she describes her personal involvement in her children's education, my mother confirms that her dependence on my father to help her understand school- related issues was mainly the result of her lack

of English proficiency and her lack of confidence in decision-making without my father's approval.

> *Sofia: Did you ever go to maybe just talk to the teacher? Did you have any problems at these meetings?*
>
> *Ida: No, not really. I never had that kind of problem because I always went with my husband and you know, between me and him, if I no understand, he understand. If somebody miss one thing, we try to help each other, but nobody ever help us.*
>
> *Sofia: Did you ever go by yourself?*
>
> *Ida: By myself . . . no! I always went with my husband.*
>
> *Sofia: Why did you never want to go by yourself? Why did you always go with your husband?*
>
> *Ida: Not because I didn't want to go by myself but because I want to make sure I understand. If I no understand, somebody will be there to understand me. And I don't feel too comfortable to make decisions about my children and school without my husband to know about it, (Interview, June 10, 2008, p. 5)*

In my research journal, I noted my mother's look of fear when I asked her whether or not she ever visited the school without my father (June 10, 2008). Her expression seemed to show that she was insecure and apprehensive about visiting the school alone for fear that she would not understand the language and perhaps make decisions without the approval of my father. In the second interview, my mother continues to demonstrate her dependence on my father when she talks about my father contacting the school.

> *Sofia: And how did you feel when you called the school?*
>
> *Ida: Well . . . my husband call and I feel much better because at least I find out the information.*
>
> *Sofia: Can you remember any times when you call the school?*
>
> *Ida: uhh . . . (long pause) . . . my husband call sometime.*
>
> *Sofia: How did you find your information if you needed to find out anything if you didn't really call the school and if you didn't contact other parents?*

> *Ida: First I try to find out from my kids and I'm sure they always tell me the truth. And if I want to find out more, then I let my husband call the school because I always think my husband speak better than me . . . English. (Interview, June 23, 2008, pp. 3-5)*

My mother feels that my father is more proficient in English; therefore, she found comfort in relying on him to get actively involved. As a child, I also viewed my father as more willing to contact the school because of his ability to somewhat understand and express himself in English. My mother's apprehensiveness in making decisions without my father's consent can be connected to their upbringing in patriarchal families where women often sought approval from their husbands prior to making important decisions that impacted the family. It would be interesting to see if my mother's attitude regarding her knowledge and understanding of the language and system in comparison to her husband is reflected in other ethnic minority women that are insecure about their knowledge and skills.

When the participants describe their attempts to participate in the educational experiences of their children, they talk about their dependence on family members. The participants rely on relatives, their children, and in my mother's case, my father to help support them in their efforts to understand the school system and their children's academic progress. The participants demonstrate that familial capital, a concept in Yosso's (2005) model of community cultural wealth, is often accessed in their attempts to become involved in their children's education. Although some educators may not consider this form of involvement as parent engagement (Pushor, 2007) or high parental involvement (Vincent & Martin, 2000), the participants indicate that they rely on their family networks to keep them informed and involved in their children's education.

Involvement at the Elementary Level Versus Involvement at the Secondary Level

In each interview, I questioned the participants about their involvement at the elementary level versus their involvement at the secondary level. All participants describe themselves as being more distant from their children's secondary schools in comparison to their children's years at the elementary level. In my experiences as a teacher, I believe that many parents, regardless of their ethnic background, are not as involved in their children's secondary education as they are involved in their children's elementary education. However, the data suggest that some ethnic minority parents find it more challenging than parents of the dominant culture to get involved in their children's secondary education as a result of the language barrier and their unfamiliarity with the school system. Ida, Filippo, Pat, and Anthony discuss their lack of involvement in terms of offering their children homework assistance in high school because they feel unable and self-conscious about their knowledge, understanding, and skills. All participants talk about their unfamiliarity with some of the programs and procedures that are in place in Ontario secondary schools such as course selection, the credit system, graduation, and postsecondary prerequisites. In discussing their experiences as ethnic minority parents of children in secondary schools, it is evident that the participants remain distant from their children's schools because they feel that their cultural knowledge, skills, and abilities are not congruent with those of the dominant culture in our Canadian society.

When I asked my mother about her understanding of her involvement with her children's homework, she referred to the assistance she offered her children when they were in elementary school.

Sofia: How often did your children ask you for help with their homework?

Ida: They ask lots when they were younger.

Sofia: When they were younger?

Ida: When they was younger . . . like they start with Kindergarten, grade 1, 2, 3, and then little bit by little bit they grow up and they no ask no more because I can't even help too much. But when they was in elementary school . . . yah . . . I did help them as much I can. (Interview, June 10, 2008, p. 6)

My mother explains that when her children were in high school, the content taught in classes became advanced and the level of language required to understand and complete the homework interfered with her ability to help her children. Booth and Dunn (1996) support my mother's experiences with homework. They believe that parents often lack confidence in their abilities to assist their children with their homework in high school because of some of the challenging and specialized material and language taught in various courses.

When I asked my father whether or not he felt comfortable assisting his children with their homework, he responded by mentioning his confidence in helping them when they were younger because the work was easy and it gave him the opportunity to improve his English skills at the same time.

Filippo: I was comfortable when they were young because the work was easy. The reading when they were young was easy because I was studying English at St. Charles, so I was reading easy word and sentence too. For math I didn't have any problem because math is easy. (Interview, July 18, 2008. p. 9)

In high school, my father explains that his children hesitated to seek assistance from him because they were aware of his lack of English proficiency and limited education.

Sofia: How about when they got a little older? Did they ask you for help?

Filippo: Not really because they know that I don't understand the language like they do and plus I didn't go to school for many years like them so they know I don't have the experience.

> *Sofia: Well you said that math was not a problem for you, so did you . . . did you continue giving them help with their math homework whenever they needed it?*
>
> *Filippo: Not always. Only when they were young because then when they were older, the math got more difficult and it looked different from the way I learned to do it. (Interview, July 18, 2008, pp. 9-10)*

Not only does my father refer to his lack of English proficiency and limited years of schooling, but he also makes reference to the cultural differences in methods of teaching and learning. He feels that he was unable to help his children with their math homework when they were in the higher grades because his knowledge and understanding of the methods used in solving mathematical equations and problems do not match the methods taught in his children's schools.

Anthony's involvement and experiences with homework as an ethnic minority parent reflect a similar pattern. He admits that helping his younger son with homework is not as challenging as helping his older son with his high school courses.

> *Anthony: Well with my son in elementary . . . he's still young . . . so . . . I can help a little bit. But my older boy I always tell him to ask the teacher because the work looks hard and some things I never learned. (Interview, July 27, 2008, p. 8)*

Similar to my father's experiences, Anthony attributes his inability to assist his older son with his homework to the fact that the work becomes more advanced and unfamiliar to him at the secondary level. The fact that he encourages his son to ask the teacher for assistance indicates that although Anthony does not have the valued knowledge and skills to help his son, he still is involved in ensuring that his son succeeds academically.

In discussing his involvement with homework, Pat also talks about his inability to assist his daughter in high school. Pat admits that his daughter's homework is more difficult now that she is in high school, and he also indicates that he encourages her to

seek homework assistance elsewhere. Similar to Anthony's experiences, Pat's encouragement to seek assistance also points to his interest in ensuring that his daughter succeeds academically. When I asked Pat about how often his children ask for his help when they are doing their homework, Pat's response reminded me of my parents' discussion regarding the fact that their children did not ask them for help as they got older because they were aware of their parents' limited knowledge in certain subject areas.

> *Pat: Well . . . you know . . . she knows I don't understand stuff she study like science and other things like very hard math . . . like when she was small up to maybe grade 8 I can help with math but high school math looks . . . looks more different . . . I never study that kind of stuff. (Interview, July, 1, 2008, p. 3)*

Pat acknowledges the fact that his daughter is aware of his limited education and that she chooses to avoid depending on him for homework help as a result of the differences in their knowledge and experiences.

The participants describe their limited involvement in terms of the inadequate homework assistance they are able to provide their children as a result of their lack of English proficiency and their limited knowledge of content taught in our school system. The participants may view themselves as being uninvolved in helping their children with their homework at the secondary level; however, I am not completely convinced that they have an accurate perception of their involvement.

I recall my parents offering me some helpful and useful pieces of information in their first language whenever I struggled to comprehend historic and geographic facts and details regarding current events around the world. It seems as though my parents do not recognize the support they offered me in their first language as true involvement and assistance. As I reflect back to my years of secondary schooling, I recall believing

that my parents could not help me with my homework because they always second-guessed their knowledge, skills, and abilities as a result of their lack of English proficiency and familiarity with course content. Constantino (2003) describes families' first languages as important tools in adapting to new learning environments and in learning new knowledge. It is possible that the participants do not perceive themselves as being capable of providing their children with homework assistance because educators have neither recognized families' first languages as valuable resources nor promoted the use of families' first languages in student learning. Yosso's (2005) model of community cultural wealth incorporates the linguistic capital of ethnic minority families that has the potential to assist students in their learning. Cummins (1986) argues that students that are instructed in their first languages perform just as well in English academic skills as students that are instructed totally through English. If educators recognize and promote ethnic minority parents as capable of supporting their children's learning using their first languages, educators can begin to deconstruct the deficit views that label ethnic minority parents as lacking the resources required in helping their children succeed in school.

In addition to exhibiting limited involvement in homework, all participants reveal their hesitation in either getting physically involved in their children's secondary school or getting actively involved in some of the choices and decisions their children are required to make throughout their years of high school. To begin, my mother expresses her beliefs as to why she remained distant from her children's secondary school.

> *Ida: In high school the parents not invited to school lots like in elementary school. In elementary school, sometime parents go on trips and they go to volunteer in*

> *class, but in high school the kids go to school and that's it. (Interview, June 23, 2008, p. 5)*

Although my mother believes that secondary schools do not call for as much physical involvement as elementary schools, she does describe visiting her children's high school a few times for parent-teacher interviews. Although she considered herself to be an involved parent in education within the home, her involvement did not consist of guiding her children through the significant decisions they were required to make at the secondary level. My mother talks about her inability to offer her children advice in making important choices concerning their course options and career choices.

> *Ida: I no give advice to my kids about courses and programs because I no understand what kids need to do to go to college or university. Other parents know these things because they go to school in Canada. My involvement in high school was more different than other parents. (Interview, June 23, 2008, p. 2)*

Like my mother, my father describes his involvement in his children's secondary education to be much less than in his children's elementary education. When I asked him why he felt as if he was more involved in his children's elementary schooling, he also talked about the limited opportunities parents have to visit their children's secondary schools.

> *Sofia: Could you just briefly go through why you weren't as involved at the secondary level?*
>
> *Filippo: Well first because the kids are older in high school so you don't have to go in the school all the time to ask permission to take them home . . . and the teachers only invite you to go to the school for interviews and some people don't even go. (Interview, July 25, 2008, p. 3)*

My father mentions that parents' attendance is not mandatory at the secondary level. Parents who do not attend the interviews might not have many other opportunities to visit the school. He also expresses his opinion regarding elementary involvement versus secondary involvement.

> *Filippo: Well I think it's easier in elementary school for people like me who came from a different country because in elementary school the kids just go to school and that's it. The teacher helps the kids a lot because they're at school with them all day and in elementary school you don't pick your classes and you don't have to make serious decisions about going to college and university. (Interview, July 18, 2008, p. 8)*

It is evident that my father understands involvement to be more of a challenge at the secondary level, especially for ethnic minorities like him. Like my mother, my father feels that he was not an active participant in his children's secondary education because he did not possess the knowledge and experiences to assist his children in planning and preparing for their futures.

My parents' perception of their limited involvement in my secondary education reveals that they are unaware of the influence they had on my academic and career choices. Although my parents were unable to offer me advice about specific courses, programs, and fields of study to pursue, I find it difficult to accept that they did not influence the choices I made in high school in preparation for my postsecondary studies. As mentioned earlier, my parents always emphasized the importance of education, second language learning, and hard work. As a result of these values emphasized in our home, I chose to pursue second language learning throughout my secondary and postsecondary education, and I worked diligently during these years of study.

> *Sofia: could you explain what kinds of things you didn't understand . . . um . . . about the high school system?*
>
> *Filippo: Well things like the classes to pick and what classes you have to have for college or university. Things like that are difficult because I never experience those things, (Interview, July 18, 2008, p. 8)*

Anthony also discusses the difference between his involvement at his younger son's elementary school versus his involvement at his older son's secondary school. He

believes that secondary schools do not provide parents with ample opportunities to visit the school except for parent-teacher interviews which usually are optional at the secondary level. Anthony attends the parent-teacher interviews at his son's elementary school and he confesses that he has visited his older son's secondary school for interviews only a couple times. Anthony explains that his reason for rarely attending interviews at the high school is because parent-teacher interviews are optional so he does not feel obliged to attend if his son is performing well in school.

> *Anthony: Uh . . . I went before . . . a couple times when it was his first year but this year I never went because I see the report card and he does okay so I decide not to go . . . like at my younger son's school you have to go to talk to the teacher, but at the high school you choose. (Interview, July 27, 2008, pp. 3-4)*

Anthony also talks about volunteering as a chaperone on elementary school trips. He explains that his son's secondary school does not ask for such involvement because the children are older.

> *Sofia: Do you visit the school any other times aside from interviews and picking your kids up and dropping them off?*
>
> *Anthony: Um . . . I went on some trips with my younger son because sometime the school ask for volunteers or people to drive and things like that.*
>
> *Sofia: How about at your son's high school? Do you ever do anything to volunteer?*
>
> *Anthony: (laugh) . . . no . . . no.*
>
> *Sofia: Why not?*
>
> *Anthony: Well . . . because . . . they don't have things like that. I don't think they need to have parents to go on trips because the kids are not small. (Interview, July 27, 2008, p. 5)*

I noted Anthony's laugh in my research journal because it seemed "very sarcastic" (July 27, 2008). I interpreted his laugh as his way of telling me that the secondary school never asks parents to get involved in the school as parent volunteers. Anthony

justifies his lack of involvement at his son's high school by stating that involvement at the secondary level is more difficult because the children are at an independent stage of their lives; therefore, the secondary school does not demand as much visibility of parents in the school. Anthony concludes this discussion by explaining that involvement at the secondary level is more difficult for ethnic minorities like him because the system is more complex and if parents are neither knowledgeable nor experienced with the practices, policies, and procedures within the system, involvement becomes challenging and awkward.

> *Sofia: At which level of schooling is it more difficult for ethnic minority parents to get involved in?*
>
> *Anthony: I think high school . . . because . . . because . . . in elementary you go more to the school. The kids are very young. There's not too much to know because they go to school and every year they go to the next grade. In high school, the kids are old and you don't go too much, and it's more complicated. So much to understand that's different. The kids have to start to be more responsible for the future and people like me . . . people like me just have to try to learn about it somehow. (Interview, July 27, 2008, p. 11)*

Rose describes herself as being uninvolved in her daughter's secondary education because she does not possess the resources to be involved the way the school wants. Rose confesses that she does not attend parent-teacher interviews because she works every afternoon and unfortunately, parent-teacher interviews run from the afternoon through to the evening. Like Anthony, Rose attributes her lack of involvement at her daughter's secondary school to the fact that her daughter is at a responsible and independent stage of her life.

> *Rose: I don't communicate with the school and the school doesn't communicate too much with me and my husband. I think because the kids in high school are old and they have to be more responsible so maybe the high school . . . uh . . . like the kids can do more for themselves. Like when the girls were small, we always walk to school together and now my daughter walks alone because she's big . . . like it's*

> *hard to be involved because there's not a reason for me to go to the school. (Interview, August 7, 2008, pp. 4-5)*

Rose also explains that at home her daughter does not seek advice regarding decisions she must make in preparation for her future. Rose trusts her daughter in making the right decisions, and she believes her daughter is capable of understanding what is best for her future. Rose trusts her daughter because her daughter understands the school system and is aware of the necessary steps she is to take in order to meet her goals. Rose also acknowledges that the knowledge she does have of the school system is the result of her daughter's patience and efforts in informing her parents of school practices, policies, and procedures.

> *Sofia: Did she ever come to you for advice as to what she should do or what she should study?*
> *Rose: No . . . no she never asked for opinions . . . she just . . . she just tells us the decision but we tell her to do what is good for her. She knows what to do better than me and my husband because she always gets the information.*
>
> *Sofia: Do you and your husband know a lot about how the high school system works and things like what things you should, what courses you should study to get into certain programs at certain universities or colleges?*
>
> *Rose: We know a little bit because the girls talk about it. (Interview, August 7, 2008, p. 7)*

It is evident that Rose's inability to physically and actively participate in her daughter's secondary education is the result of her inexperience with the Ontario secondary school system. When her daughter was young, Rose understood her involvement in terms of the nurturance she offered, such as the walks to school that she mentioned earlier in the interview. Now that her daughter is in high school, Rose encourages her daughter to take responsibility for her own education since she is more knowledgeable of the system than her parents.

Some may argue that Rose's involvement could also be influenced by her socioeconomic status. Rose has been living in Canada for 8 years; therefore she is considered a fairly recent newcomer in comparison to the other participants. Rose talks about being unable to visit her daughter's secondary school because she works long hours every afternoon and evening. Since Rose has not been working to establish herself socially and economically as long as some of the other participants, perhaps Rose has not had the time to actively participate in her daughter's secondary education. Alomar (2006) explains that a mother's involvement in education increases with high socioeconomic status. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (1998), children from families with household incomes over $75,000 have highly involved mothers in comparison to children from families with incomes less than $25,000. Of course a mother's social status is just as significant to her involvement in her children's education as her economic status. As time progresses, Rose may feel less anxious about getting involved in her daughter's schooling because she may become more confident in her ability to communicate in English and familiar with various aspects of the Ontario education system.

Pat also describes himself as being more physically involved in his daughter's education when she was in elementary school. Similar to Ida, and Anthony's experiences, Pat visited his daughter's elementary school often because the school offered parents numerous opportunities to physically participate in school activities. Pat's challenges as an ethnic minority parent of a child in high school reflect the challenges of the other participants in this study. Pat feels he is not as involved in his daughter's schooling as he used to be because, like the other participants, he neither

feels pressed to visit the school nor does he feel experienced enough to influence the decisions she makes regarding courses, programs, and career choices. It is therefore evident that all participants perceive themselves as uninvolved in their children's secondary education due to their lack of physical involvement within the high schools. Certainly parents of the dominant culture experience similar challenges at the secondary panel as a result of the secondary school structure and their children's age and independence; however, parents of the dominant culture who have been educated in Ontario and are proficient in English may have an advantage over ethnic minority parents because of their familiarity with the Ontario education system and their ability to understand and inquire about the system.

Based on the participants' dependence on their children to make their own choices regarding education and careers, I realize that the participants' children have a great deal of responsibility. My parents had a limited understanding of the Ontario secondary school system; therefore, in high school, I had the responsibility of researching my future options, informing my parents of the options available, and then making decisions based on what seemed reasonable and realistic. I believe that having had the responsibility to make my own decisions about my future schooling and career, with limited guidance from my parents, was an advantage because I knew exactly the path I wanted to take. On the other hand, I do not believe that it is an advantage for all teenagers to make important choices without proper guidance from their parents. Based on my experiences as a secondary school teacher, I find that many students are confused and constantly seeking input and advice about their future goals and plans. Throughout the interviews, the participants did not refer to their children's attitudes

towards having to make significant choices with little direction from their parents. It would be interesting to see if the participants' children believe that having such responsibilities and expectations is advantageous.

Although the participants describe themselves as not having much input in their children's academic decisions at the secondary level, I am left to wonder whether they truly have had no effect on their children's choices or whether they are unaware of the ways in which they influence their children's learning in high school. Similar to my beliefs about my parents' experiences, I think that the participants are ignorant to the ways in which their values are influential to their children's decisions and academic progress. It is evident that the participants perceive themselves as uninvolved in their children's secondary education due to students' maturity and independence at this stage and the schools' limited need for parental visibility within the school. I am hesitant to believe that the participants are truly uninvolved in their children's secondary education because their experiences indicate that they often access their familial, moral, linguistic, and aspirational capital to encourage and ensure that their children work hard to achieve academically. It is possible that the participants perceive themselves as uninvolved in their children's secondary education because the school system does not recognize these forms of capital as valuable to the participants' involvement in their children's education.

The Language Barrier as a Challenge

All participants admit that the language barrier is one of the biggest challenges for them as they attempt involvement in their children's education. As a result of their lack of English proficiency, the participants explain that they feel nervous in the

school, they become dependent on family and their children, and they have a lack of self-confidence in offering homework assistance and in visiting the school for various events. The participants' experiences reflect Samaras and Wilson's (1999) claim that the language barrier is one of several factors that may affect families' interactions with schools.

My parents use the word "nervous" a few times throughout the interviews when they explain how the language barrier affected their visits to the school.

> *Sofia: Ok . . . um . . . how did you feel when you entered the school? If you had to go to the school for example to pick us up or if you had to drop us off and you had to go in the school for some reason, how did you feel when you went inside?*
>
> *Ida: A little nervous! But if you have to go, you have to go.*
>
> *Sofia: Why were you nervous?*
>
> *Ida: Well nervous all the time because maybe if they ask me something probably I'm scared maybe I don't understand...you know...this and that. (Interview, June 10, 2008. pp. 4-5)*

My father indicates that he was more nervous when he was a recent immigrant because of his lower level of English proficiency at that time period.

> *Filippo: With you my first child I was more nervous because I was only in Canada for a few years so I didn't really understand the language and I didn't know too much about the school. But after many years of being in Canada, I start to understand more. (Interview, July 18, 2008, p. 7)*

I always knew my parents' struggled as a result of their limited English; however, I find it somewhat shocking to learn that their challenges as non-English speakers created such feelings of anxiety. Anthony also expresses similar emotions when he describes his visits to his son's school as a recent newcomer to the country. He uses words such as "scary" to describe his feelings of discomfort in the school.

Sofia: What were your biggest concerns when you brought your child to school?

Anthony: Uh . . . well . . . for sure I think it was the language at the beginning because I didn't know too much English . . . I just knew a few words. It's really hard and it's scary too when you go to a place and you don't understand the people that talk and they don't understand you. (Interview, July 27, 2008, p. 9)

Rose describes the nervousness she experienced during one of her first visits to her daughter's elementary school because of her lack of English proficiency.

Rose: I remember one day when I went to the school to bring my daughter her lunch because she forget her lunch. I was only in Canada maybe like 2 or 3 months. My English was really no good before. I go in the school to tell the secretary and she say I can go to bring the lunch to my daughter. The secretary . . . she explain to me the classroom . . . how to find the classroom but I don't understand the directions. It was difficult for me you know. So I start to walk and I start to get nervous and I look and I look and I can't find the classroom. I was so nervous . . .and . . . and I didn't know what to do so I just walk to try to find it. I walk for maybe more than 10 minutes and I think maybe it's a good idea to . . . to go ask again . . . but . . . but I was embarrassed and I was nervous because I don't know how to ask the question, so I just keep walking until I find the room. After that time I didn't want to go to the school to talk anymore. (Interview, August 7, 2008, p. 9)

In this brief account of her struggle to locate her daughter's classroom in the school, Rose reveals that her lack of English proficiency limited her understanding of information and instructions at the school and created feelings of nervousness which inhibited her from asking questions and wanting to visit the school in the future. Her experience also shows a lack of communication and understanding on behalf of the school. The secretary did not consider the possible challenges Rose might have encountered in the school as an ethnic minority parent. The secretary's lack of consideration was most likely unintentional; however, it was assumed that Rose understood the directions given and that she could find her way around the school without difficulty. If the secretary or any other staff member had recognized Rose's limited ability to understand and express herself in English and accommodated her linguistic needs, perhaps she would have felt more welcomed, comfortable, and respected in her daughter's school. According to Pushor (2007), providing language

support in schools for ethnic minority parents is essential in creating a welcoming and engaging environment.

In addition to causing nervousness and fear, the language barrier also hinders ethnic minority parents' ability to assist their children with homework. Anthony admits to feeling some discomfort in helping his children with their homework because he feels that he does not possess the language skills required to help his children succeed academically.

Sofia: How do you feel about helping them?

Anthony: Well . . . it's okay now because my English is better so at least I can almost understand everything they show me, but still I don't like it if they ask me to help them write things like stories and reports because my writing is not good like how they write. (Interview, July 27, 2008, p. 5)

Although Anthony feels somewhat hesitant about offering homework assistance, he still acknowledges the fact that he is able to help his children as best he can in spite of his insecurities in using the English language. My mother also identifies the language barrier as being the main issue that inhibits her involvement with homework.

Sofia: What were the types of problems you had when you tried to provide homework assistance?

Ida: English!

Sofia: Were there any school subjects you felt comfortable with?

Ida: Um . . . math.

Sofia: Math? Why math?

Ida: Because math it's same thing. It's no English. (Interview, June 10, 2008, p. 7)

Although my mother admits that the English language was an obstacle that interfered in her involvement with her children's homework, she acknowledges the fact that she was able to assist her children in subject areas, such as math, that did not require excessive

use of the English language. Her ability to help her children with their math homework reveals that she was involved in her children's learning and that she did possess knowledge and skills that were transferable to her children in spite of her lack of English proficiency. Anthony and Ida describe the challenges they encounter in helping their children with their homework as English language learners; yet, they demonstrate their efforts to sometimes assist their children by using the language, knowledge, and skills they possess and value. Anthony's and Ida's experiences reveal that they are unaware of how valuable their first languages are in assisting their children in their learning. Perhaps their hesitation to consistently use their first languages as tools in assisting their children with their homework is the result of the lack of value placed on ethnic minority parents' linguistic capital by some educators.

The participants also describe how the language barrier has an effect on their self-confidence when they visit the school for various events such as meetings and interviews. Anthony describes his discomfort at the grade 9 parents meeting at his son's secondary school. Anthony felt it was important to attend the meeting; however, he found that the information presented was unclear to him as a result of the language.

> *Sofia: So you went . . . and . . . what exactly did they talk about at this meeting?*
>
> *Anthony: They talk about things like classes the kids have to take and how many they need to graduate and like that.*
>
> *Sofia: Oh . . . so I guess they did make an effort to explain the system to you.*
>
> *Anthony: Yes but it's one night and . . . uh . . . like if you are like me and you don't understand English perfect and if you don't have the same experience . . . it's not . . . it's not easy to learn about it and to understand . . . For sure the Canadian parents don't have the problem to communicate because they speak English. (Interview, July 27, 2008, pp. 8-9)*

In addition to talking about his feelings of uncertainty and insecurity, Anthony also demonstrates a feeling of inferiority when he makes reference to how privileged

English-speaking parents are because of their ability to understand the information. Anthony suggests that schools consider non-English-speaking parents when communicating information to parents at meetings and interviews. Like Anthony, Rose also comments on the challenges her husband faced at the grade 9 parents meeting.

- *Sofia: What about the parent night you talked about? Was that enough for you to understand the high school system?*

  Rose: I didn't go because I have afternoon shift but my husband went but it's the same thing. You understand some things but not everything because he say the language is very . . . is very . . . (long pause)

  Sofia: You mean they use a lot of words that are related to the teaching or education field . . . I think you can call it technical language. Like I wouldn't understand doctors talk because they use language that is relevant to their work.

  Rose: Yes . . . it's so difficult! He say it was complicated and he only understand some stuff. (Interview, August 7, 2008, pp. 7-8)

Anthony and Rose demonstrate how the language barrier can trigger feelings of uncertainty and inferiority in ethnic minority parents that attempt involvement in their children's education. Their lack of English proficiency and understanding of technical jargon could negatively influence their knowledge of the school system and their awareness of events that take place. Anthony's and Rose's accounts not only reveal the challenges experienced by ethnic minority parents as a result of the language barrier, but they exhibit the school system's failure to recognize, acknowledge, and accommodate the needs of ethnic minority parents.

Based on the participants' accounts of the challenges they confront as ethnic minority parents in their children's education, there is no doubt that the language barrier has an impact on how they interact within the school and how they perceive their involvement. As a result of their lack of English proficiency, the participants feel insecure about visiting the schools, helping their children with their homework, and

participating in various school events. After closely exploring the participants' experiences with the language barrier, I realize that their lack of English proficiency is only partially responsible for the participants' challenges and struggles as ethnic minority parents in their children's education. The participants reveal that the school system can also be held accountable for the participants' feelings of nervousness, incompetence, and inferiority. Rose's story about not understanding directions and getting lost in her daughter's school indicates the school's failure to create a welcoming environment and provide assistance to non-English speakers. Anthony's and Rose's stories regarding their struggles in understanding information at parent meetings point out the schools' disregard for parents outside the dominant culture who are not fluent in the English language and are unfamiliar with technical jargon. The participants' experiences demonstrate that some schools may not value the linguistic capital of ethnic minority parents; therefore, these parents are led to believe that their first languages are barriers they must overcome in order to become engaged or highly involved in their children's education. Literature indicates that often educators blame the language barrier for ethnic minority parents' distance from the school environment (Delpit, 1998; Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Samaras & Wilson, 1999; G. Lopez et al.; Munn, 1993). In blaming the language barrier for ethnic minority parents' inability to understand, communicate, and interact in the schools, educators do not recognize the system's failure to accommodate and engage all parents in students' learning.

Strengthening Ties Between Schools and Ethnic Minority Parents

In all interviews, I asked the participants to suggest ways in which schools could strengthen their ties with ethnic minority parents to ensure that all parents are

given the opportunity to become involved in their children's education. Two common themes that emerge from the participants' suggestions are the development of support programs for ethnic minority families in schools and educators' support in encouraging parent-networking within the school. The participants' interest in broadening their involvement as ethnic minority parents in their children's education is evident in the data.

Ida, Filippo, Anthony, and Rose suggest that schools implement specific procedures to ensure that non-English-speaking parents are able to understand the information communicated to them and that they are able to express their concerns to educators in a comprehensive manner. Ida, Filippo, Anthony, and Rose recommend that schools hire staff members or perhaps seek outside support from people who can act as interpreters and translators for both non-English- speaking parents and educators.

> *Ida: First they should have someone to translate and maybe like send a letter, like in different language so people can understand and explain to the people how the school work. (June 10, 2008, p. 10)*

> *Filippo: It should be necessary to hire some teachers that speak different language at school. Maybe not everybody, but if you know for example that in a school there are many parents who speak Spanish, then maybe there should be a few people at that school who can speak Spanish so they can help these families understand. (July 18, 2008, p. 13)*

> *Anthony: Something I think that is very difficult for some is the language . . . so I think it's good if they have some people that can translate because I remember it was so difficult to understand especially at the beginning. (July 27, 2008, p. 11)*

> *Rose: Maybe somebody who understands the language we speak could help us. Maybe they tell me more information about the school and how people like me can help my kids. (Interview, August 7, 2008, p. 11)*

Although they all suggest that staff be made available to translate and interpret for them in the school, each of the 4 participants demonstrate individuality in terms of why they think this type of support is required and how this form of support should be

made available. Both Ida and Rose feel it is necessary to have someone in the school to translate for non-English-speaking parents; however, Ida adds to this suggestion by mentioning that information sent home should be translated in various languages to assist ethnic minorities in their understanding of the school system. Filippo suggested hiring teachers that speak the languages of the majority of non-English- speaking parents and Anthony proposed that translators be made available in schools primarily for those parents who are recent newcomers because he recalls his personal experiences in his children's school as a recent immigrant and he remembers how difficult it was to communicate with such limited knowledge and understanding of the English language. Providing ethnic minority parents with language support in the school was the first suggestion offered by Ida, Filippo, Anthony, and Rose. Language seems to be one of the more pressing concerns for ethnic minority parents as they attempt involvement in their children's education.

In addition to providing parents with language support in the schools, the participants believe that further support from the schools is necessary in ensuring that ethnic minority parents understand the school system and their role as parents in their children's schooling. My father recommends that high schools educate ethnic minority parents about the school and about the various ways in which they can involve themselves in their children's education.

Sofia: Do you have any other suggestions as to how schools can strengthen their relationship with ethnic minority parents?

Filippo: Well I think help with the language is the first thing, and then somehow try to find a way to explain to these parents how things are in this country. I think there has to be a way to show new immigrants what to do for the kids when they go to school. I think it must be more hard for new immigrants that come here when the kids are in high school because maybe they don't understand the school and the language and maybe the kids don't understand it also. This is very bad because the

> *parents can't trust the kids to understand like I trust my kids to explain things to me . . . . Someone should have a job to do this. Maybe it can't be the teacher or the principal because they have to do other things, but somebody should be at the school for this kind of work. (Interview, July 18, 2008, p. 13)*

My father acknowledges the challenges families face in the schools as a result of the parents' and children's lack of English proficiency and familiarity with the system. His suggestion to support ethnic minority families in their involvement reflects Anthony's thoughts concerning the help that could be made available for these families in schools. Coincidentally, both my father and Anthony mention the need for someone other than an administrator or teacher to take on the role of supporting ethnic minority parents in parents' efforts to become involved. Like my father, Anthony feels that providing extra support to ethnic minority families in high schools is an onerous task for administrators and teachers that are already occupied with so many other projects to manage.

> *Anthony: There should be people in the school to help these people all the time . . . it's hard for a teacher to do that so maybe it has to be one person in charge to help these parents understand everything about the school and everything about how they help their kids with homework and things like that. (Interview, July 27, 2008, p. 12)*

Anthony explains that children may benefit because they might not feel as compelled to keep their parents informed of educational issues while striving to get through their years of schooling. He believes that by informing ethnic minority parents of school programs, policies, and procedures, educators are giving all parents the opportunity to understand and contribute to their children's education.

> *Anthony: If teachers and principals take more time to help people like me from different countries . . . then there will be less pressure on the children to only help themselves. That way their parents can teach them about the things they can do in the future and how they can get those things in the future. (Interview, July 27, 2008, p. 11)*

When I asked my mother about her suggestions as to how schools can strengthen their ties with ethnic minority parents, she suggests that schools host parent information nights specifically for ethnic minority parents that lack English proficiency and are unfamiliar with the school system. She explains that educators could offer ethnic minority parents information regarding procedures, policies, and programs, especially in high schools. Based on her experiences, some of these parents might not understand how high schools function; for example, parents might not understand the credit system and the proper steps to be taken in order to graduate. Pat also discusses the notion of inviting the parents to the school to familiarize them with the system.

> *Pat: Well . . . if someone is new to the country . . . it's going to take a long time to learn the language and to learn about how the school works so the teachers should prepare something especially for these people . . . maybe the school can invite these parents often and teach them how the school works because if not maybe they never get involved. I go to interviews, and I go in the school to talk to the teacher because now I'm here so long and I teach and force myself, but there still many things I no do. (Interview, July 27, 2008, p. 7)*

Pat demonstrates that with time he was able to learn the language and familiarize himself with the school system; however, he admits that he could be so much more involved in his daughter's education if only he had received some sort of direction as to how to strengthen his involvement.

In discussing possible ideas as to how schools can strengthen ties with ethnic minority parents, Rose also suggests developing some sort of support program which consists of organizing meetings, especially for ethnic minority families that struggle with the language and their understanding of the education system. Based on her personal experiences, Rose feels that some non-English-speaking parents might not understand information presented to them at various school events.

> *Rose: I think teachers should understand that we don't have good vocabulary even if we talk a little bit, so I don't think it's good when there's maybe a presentation for parents and people like me who don't understand the information. Maybe they can do something separate for people like me. (Interview, August 7, 2008, p. 11)*

Throughout the interview, Rose often used the term "people like me" when she referred to ethnic minority parents. As I noted in my research journal (August 7, 2008), it seems as though Rose separates ethnic minority parents like herself from parents of the dominant culture in order to demonstrate that ethnic minorities' experiences in the schools are different from those of parents of the dominant culture; therefore, schools need to consider these differences in their attempts to encourage and welcome parent involvement. In describing her ideas for support programs, Rose also talks about the need for schools to accommodate recent newcomers in the system. Like Filippo and Pat, Rose believes that recent newcomers would benefit from assistance in overcoming the challenges associated with language and unfamiliarity with the education system.

As well as offering language support and providing parents with opportunities to visit the school and learn about the system, the participants also suggest encouraging and emphasizing parent-networking among ethnic minorities. When I asked the participants about their contacts with other parents of students at their children's schools, they all talk about meeting and getting to know other parents at the elementary level. Ida, Filippo, and Pat explain that they often encountered parents at their children's elementary schools because they visited the schools more often. At the secondary level, they recognize how difficult it is to connect with other parents because of the very few opportunities they get to visit the schools.

> *Ida: We no get too many opportunities to see each other, especially when the kids in high school. In high school the parents not invited to schools lots like in elementary school. In elementary school, sometime parents go on trips and they go*

> *to volunteer in class but in high school the kids go to school and that's it. (Interview, June 21, 2008. pp. 4-5)*
>
> *Filippo: I never really see any parents in high school...because I never go in the school. And my kids at that age do everything for themselves. (Interview, July 18, 2008. p. 15)*
>
> *Pat: In elementary I know some parents because we pick up the kids and I went on some trips, but now in high school it's very different . . . I don't go to the school too much. (Interview, July 7, 2008, p. 5)*

Based on the participants' accounts of their experiences, I realize the limited opportunities parents have to connect with parents of other students. I do not recall my parents ever sharing their concerns, questions, and advice regarding educational issues with parents of my classmates in high school. I also realize that their absence is not entirely the result of their cultural differences. Their lack of physical presence in the schools is partially due to the nature of the high school system which does not require as much physical assistance and support from parents in comparison to the elementary system. As a result of this physical distance, it is difficult for parents to network, work together, and share ideas.

Although some of the participants acknowledge the fact that they rarely come into contact with parents of other students at the secondary level, all participants agree that parent-networking would be beneficial in assisting ethnic minority parents with their involvement in their children's education. Ida, Pat, and Rose believe that parent-networking is an advantage to ethnic minority parents who wish to learn about the school system and get involved in their children's education. They think that parent-networking is especially helpful for parents that share a common language and culture because they can help each other understand the unfamiliar system and get involved in their children's schooling.

Ida: Well I think it's a good idea to meet the other parents so you can talk about things you don't even know and probably maybe you meet parents from same culture and you know you can help each other. (Interview, June 21, 2008, pp. 4-5)

Pat: Well if you know somebody from your culture you can work together to understand...maybe the parents will be less nervous to ask questions . . . maybe because they are in the same situation . . . (Interview, July 7, 2008, p. 6)

Rose: Maybe I can find people from my country with the same troubles or the same questions, so maybe we can help each other. That's good! (Interview, August 12, 2008, p. 12)

My father recalls the difficulties he had throughout his early years as an ethnic minority parent in his children's schools; therefore, he believes that new immigrants would definitely benefit from schools giving ethnic minority parents the opportunity to connect with one another. Likewise, Pat thinks that parent-networking is an advantage for new immigrants, especially at the secondary level where involvement becomes more challenging.

Filippo: These parents can meet each other and they can be friends and they can help each other if they don't understand . . . I think that would be a good thing for new immigrants maybe not old immigrants because I had more problems when I first came to the country. (Interview, July 18, 2008, p. 15)

Pat: It's good for new immigrants especially because they can make friends and they can learn faster . . . especially for high school because it's hard to understand stuff. (Interview, July 7, 2008, p. 5)

Although the participants do not provide many suggestions as to how schools can promote parent networking, Rose does offer one suggestion that could possibly encourage ethnic minorities to come into contact with one another. Rose suggests that schools encourage parent-networking amongst ethnic minority parents by holding parent nights at the schools for newcomers seeking information in multiple languages about school procedures, policies, and events. By providing parents with an opportunity to get involved and familiarized with the new system, parents might also take this opportunity to meet other parents who might share similar experiences and a

common interest in wanting to get involved in their children's educational experiences. There is no doubt that the participants in this study share in Samaras and Wilson's (1999) belief that it is "essential for families to work together, share ideas, network, and show their children that education is very important" (p. 520).

By considering some of the participants' suggestions as to how to strengthen schools' ties with ethnic minority parents, educators can begin to recognize ethnic minority parents' community cultural wealth, and they can offer these parents an opportunity to explore and understand the ways in which their knowledge, skills, and experiences support their children's learning. In establishing a strong rapport with the schools, ethnic minority parents can also become acquainted with the cultural capital of the dominant culture. By developing an understanding of the various ways in which other parents participate in their children's learning, ethnic minority parents can gain some insight as to how to become further involved or engaged in their children's educational experiences. As ethnic minority parents are given the opportunity to employ their knowledge, skills, and experiences, they may feel more confident in fully participating in all aspects of their children's learning.

Parental Involvement in the Ontario Curriculum and Policy Documents

After having explored the participants' suggestions as to how to strengthen the ties between ethnic minority parents and educators, I analyzed two currently released documents by the Ontario Ministry of Education to determine whether or not the ministry indicates any attempts to meet the needs of ethic minority parents in Ontario's elementary and secondary schools. The 2007 revised edition of the Ontario Curriculum *Grades 9 to 12 English as a Second Language and English Literacy Development*

curriculum document (2007c) and the policy document for elementary and secondary English language learners entitled *English Language Learners: ESL and ELD Programs and Services* (2007a) both developed by the Ontario Ministry of Education, address the involvement of ethnic minority parents in education.

The Ontario curriculum (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007c) for English language learners states, "Studies show that students perform better in school if their parents are involved in their education" (p. 7). It further explains that involved parents have the opportunity to become aware of what is being taught and what their children are expected to learn. This knowledge can help parents talk about their children's progress and of course ask questions when concerned. The document also mentions other effective ways in which parents can get involved in their children's learning, for example, "attending parent-teacher interviews, participating in parent workshops, becoming involved in school council activities (including becoming a school council member), and supporting their children to maintain active use of the home language" (p. 7). All of these suggestions on how to involve parents in education are supported in the limited research on effective parental involvement practices (Booth & Dunn, 1996; Constantino, 2003; Eulina & Carvalho, 2001; G. Lopez et al., 2001; McKenna & Willms, 1998; Pushor & Murphy, 2004). The ESL and ELD curriculum acknowledges that "special efforts are needed in order to reach out to parents whose educational experiences might have been quite different from those of Ontario-born parents" because they themselves may be dealing with culture shock and language difficulties (p. 11); however, the document does not go into any detail as to what efforts should be made to involve ethnic minority parents, and there is no mention of how to show them

that their knowledge, skills, and experiences are of value to their children's learning. The Ministry suggests that parents be given information on the role of parents in Ontario schools (p. 23), but it is left up to the schools to decide what measures need to be taken to actively engage all parents in the unfamiliar school system to ensure that their children are receiving the accommodations, experiences, and tools to succeed academically.

As previously mentioned, the Ministry has also recently released its first policy document for English language learners entitled *English Language Learners: ESL and ELD Programs and* Services (2007a). The policy document emphasizes the importance of "welcoming English language learners and their families and providing them with the appropriate orientation to the Ontario school system, in the first language of the students and their families whenever possible" (p. 15). The document provides information on how to establish appropriate orientation programs. The Ministry suggests that parents be given information about courses and about considerations related to course selection, explanation of programs and activities, explanation of school policies, explanation of the school structure, and information about community activities and supports. The Ministry also recommends that information be provided to parents through workshops, flyers, handbooks, web newsletters, and mentorship. There is no doubt that the Ministry acknowledges the importance of accommodating ethnic minority parents and offers some excellent suggestions as to how to inform parents of the policies, practices, and procedures; however, in my experiences as an ESL teacher, helping these parents understand the new school system involves more than just an informative orientation. Providing ethnic minority parents with a flyer or handbook

with information about school policies, practices, and procedures may not be the most effective way of helping them understand the unfamiliar school system.

When educators provide ethnic minority parents with information about school policies, practices and procedures and offer tips and suggestions as to how ethnic minority parents can become involved in their children's learning, ethnic minority parents become informed; however, educators are not allowing these parents to become engaged in their children's education. Pushor's (2007) description of parent engagement depicts an environment in which both educators and parents share their knowledge and expertise so that the personal and academic needs of students are met at school and at home. The Ministry of Education's efforts to involve ethnic minority parents in the school system do not reflect a sense of reciprocity between educators and parents. In fact, the Ministry's efforts seem to reflect Pushor's comparison of school systems to protectorates. She describes a protectorate "as a colonialist structure in which those with strength (the colonizers) take charge in order to protect those without strength (the colonized)" (p. 2). Pushor uses the metaphor of a protectorate to describe the typical way that school has been structured throughout the years because educators have often acted as experts in teaching and learning. She explains that educators over the years have entered communities, designed and enacted policies, procedures, and programs, and provided communities with their perception of best practices and strategies that influence student achievement. The Ministry's current curriculum and policy for English language learners offers useful information about the school system and strategies that can be implemented to involve ethnic minority parents in the school, but they do not indicate the importance of recognizing ethnic minority parents' cultural

capital or community cultural wealth as assets in their children's education. Furthermore, the documents do not emphasize the need for reciprocity amongst educators and parents; therefore, ethnic minority parents may be unaware of the fact that their knowledge, skills, and experiences play a significant role in their children's learning.

Despite the efforts on behalf of the Ministry of Education to acknowledge the practices and procedures that are required to involve ethnic minority parents in schools, my personal experiences as a secondary ESL teacher indicate that ethnic minority parents are not involved at the same rate as parents of the dominant culture. Many families need assistance in understanding how they can take part in their children's learning, and they need to understand that their community cultural wealth is valuable to their children's education. Although the Ontario Ministry of Education has recognized the need to accommodate and involve ethnic minority parents in recent programming and policy (2007a), it is the responsibility of educators to ensure that ethnic minority parents are given the opportunity to become active participants in schools and in the educational experiences of their children.

Brief Conclusion of Chapter Four

The participants perceived themselves as involved parents, even though their involvement might not be recognized as high parental involvement or parent engagement by some educators and parents of the dominant culture. All participants understand their involvement in terms of the concern they demonstrate for their children's academic progress in addition to the care and emotional support they offer them. The participants also demonstrate that they are involved and interested in their

children's education when describing the ways in which they depend on their family and friends to keep them informed and aware of their children's progress and other school-related issues. In describing their involvement, they also discuss the challenges they encounter in their children's schooling, in particular their struggle to understand and communicate in English, their lack of familiarity with the school system, and their challenges in getting physically involved in their children's secondary schools. The participants suggest various ways in which schools can make their relationships with ethnic minority parents stronger. A common theme that emerges in their suggestions is this idea of developing specific support programs within schools which require educators to acknowledge the knowledge, skills, and experiences of ethnic minority parents and accommodate their cultural and linguistic needs.

The Ontario Ministry of Education has recognized the need to accommodate and involve ethnic minority parents in recent programming and policy (2007 a, b, c); however, the ministry does not suggest specific strategies and methods in ensuring that ethnic minority parents employ their community cultural wealth to assist their children in their learning. The participants' experiences reveal that once educators begin to recognize the various forms of capital that ethnic minority parents access in order to become involved in their children's education, more parents may have an opportunity to feel that they are valuable assets in their children's learning experiences, and educators may begin to reconsider some of the deficit views that label ethnic minority parents as uninvolved, uninterested, and disadvantaged.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

As I near the end of my journey as a novice researcher, I realize that my findings merely provide a snapshot of some of the challenges and obstacles that ethnic minority parents must overcome in our schools in order to support their children in their learning. It may seem unrealistic for me to believe that my work as a novice researcher could influence the school system as a whole; however, I believe that a deeper understanding of the experiences of some ethnic minority parents can assist me in showing my students' parents that they are valuable resources in their children's schooling. My new knowledge of ethnic minority parents' involvement in their children's education can also help me to act as an advocate for these parents that educators often label as uninterested, uninvolved, and disadvantaged.

I chose to conduct this interpretive qualitative study using the experiences of my parents along with 3 other ethnic minority parents of students currently in Ontario secondary schools. Through the in-depth, open-ended interviews, the participants share their understanding of their involvement in their children's education as ethnic minority parents. They describe their challenges and the limited support they receive from the schools, and they voice their opinions regarding various ways in which schools could strengthen their ties with ethnic minority parents so that all parents have the opportunity to assist and guide their children through their years of schooling.

My Initial Perception and My New Understanding

I feel fortunate to have had my parents participate in my study because it gave me the opportunity to unveil their understanding of their actions, attitudes, and beliefs as they attempted involvement during my years of schooling. In listening to their

understanding and their experiences as ethnic minority parents, I realize that some of my childhood perceptions of their involvement are inaccurate. As a child and adolescent, I believed that my parents wanted to be more involved in my schooling, but unfortunately they could not be as involved as they would have liked to have been due to their lack of English proficiency and their limited knowledge of the Ontario school system.

Through this study, I have learned that my parents' involvement in my education stretched beyond the occasional parent-teacher interview. I have come to realize that my parents' involvement in my education was different from the involvement of parents from the dominant culture. My parents valued specific forms of involvement such as providing nurturance and offering emotional support. These forms of involvement may not be classified as forms of parent engagement by some educators because they may not recognize such informal activities as being influential to students' academic progress. In this study, I include a list of various ways parents from the dominant culture and my participants understand parental involvement in children's education (See Appendix E).

Through this study, I also recognize that my parents have an inaccurate perception of their involvement in my education as well. Several times throughout the interviews, they make reference to their inability to assist me with my homework. It seems that my parents do not realize the impact they had on my learning when they helped me using their first language. As a result of their experiences, I understand that the school system did not value their first language as a tool that could guide me through my schooling. It is possible that my parents did not feel equipped with the

proper cultural resources required to promote my academic success because the school itself did not value their linguistic capital.

As a child, I believed that my mother chose to remain distant from the school as a result of her inability to communicate in English. During the interviews with my mother, I was able to gain a clearer understanding of her insecurities as an ethnic minority parent and I realized that her limited years of schooling could be attributed to her distance from the school just as much as her lack of English proficiency. Several times throughout the interviews, she justifies her physical absence from the school by referring to her limited education. Her reasons for not being able to help her children with their homework and not visiting the school reflect Sook Lee and Bowen's (2006) belief that often parents with limited years of schooling find it challenging to help with homework and become involved in various aspects of the school. My mother's reasons for limiting her involvement within the school were twofold. First, she felt that she did not possess the institutionalized form of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) required to understand educational issues and help her children in their studies, and second, the school did not value her knowledge, skills, and experiences that could have assisted her children in their learning.

Despite the obstacles that stood in the way of my parents' involvement in their children's education, they managed to stay in tune with various educational issues as a result of the guidance and assistance I offered them during my childhood and adolescence. I learned that I played a significant role in their involvement as ethnic minority parents and in their understanding of the practices and procedures in place at the school. I recognize that I played the role of the "cultural border crosser" which

Martinez-Cosio, and Iannacone (2007) describe as being a child that assists and interprets for his or her parents as they face dominant institutions. I understand that my parents were challenged as ethnic minority parents in my schooling because their community cultural wealth was not valued by the school system; therefore, they used my ability to communicate as a resource to help them understand the education system and stay in tune with their children's academic progress.

As I think back to my experiences as the cultural border crosser, I realize the enormous pressure placed on me as a young child. I was responsible for translating and interpreting for my parents when they faced dominant institutions, I felt compelled to inform my parents of various events and important information regarding my education, and I was often encouraged to assist my younger brothers with their homework. I recall feeling burdened at times, but I never attributed this weight to the fact that I was a child of ethnic minority parents, and I never considered that children of families from the dominant culture may not experience the challenges of helping their parents adapt to an unfamiliar environment and language. My parents' participation in this study has helped me realize that my identity as a child of ethnic minority parents definitely influenced the way I lived my life during my childhood and adolescence.

After interviewing both my parents and sharing with them my initial perceptions of their involvement, I thanked them for sharing their experiences and clearing up any misconceptions I may have had. My father expressed his satisfaction with our discussion, and he attributed some of our misconceptions about our experiences to the limited opportunities we have to sit and talk about our experiences, perceptions, and feelings.

> *Filippo: Sometimes we don't know things because we don't have time to talk about it. Now we talked and you understand what I was thinking and doing and now I know what you were thinking. It's good . . . it's good. We have to talk more in the family or else we don't know nothing. (Interview, July 18, 2008, p. 12)*

As a result of exploring my parents' experiences as ethnic minority parents, I feel that I have developed a greater appreciation and respect for my parents' role in my education.

My Parents' Influence on My Education, Career, and Professional Development

Prior to conducting this study, I had not realized the extent to which my parents have played a role in my academic and professional development. As I conclude this study, I find it necessary to acknowledge how my parents' experiences as ethnic minorities influenced and continue to influence my decisions throughout the various stages of my life.

Growing up as a child of immigrant parents has influenced my choice of study, my choice of career, and my professional development as a secondary school teacher. At the early age of 4, I was exposed to language learning when my parents sent me to Italian school on the weekends. Although I always spoke Italian in the home, I continued studying Italian throughout elementary and secondary school to develop my skills in reading and writing. As a result of my parents exposing me to language learning at such a young age, it was not as challenging for me to learn French in elementary school. I therefore decided to pursue my studies in French throughout secondary school as well. My parents have always been advocates for second language learning and they always reminded me of the benefits of speaking multiple languages. I remember my mother always telling me how much easier her move to Canada would have been if only she had learned to speak English prior to her arrival. When I began my postsecondary education, I was aware of the importance of speaking second

languages so I chose to continue my studies in Italian and French. Throughout my four years of post-secondary, I worked diligently at trying to master the second and third languages. My motivation and dedication in learning Italian and French can be attributed to the value placed on language during my childhood and adolescence. The positive attitude towards language learning that I carried with me to school had developed from my experiences at home. Although my parents were unable to help me with my homework and participate in various school events when I was a child, their experiences and their values definitely impacted my academic choices and success as a child, an adolescent, and a young adult.

In addition to influencing my academic achievements and choices, my parents' experiences as immigrants also affected my choice of career and my ongoing professional development. After 2 years of teaching French at a local secondary school, I expressed an interest in teaching English as a Second Language (ESL). I felt that I was a good candidate for the job since I spent countless years helping my father with his ESL homework and 3 years as an ESL tutor at a local adult education center. After having received my additional qualification in ESL, I began teaching ESL with a strong sense of enthusiasm, excitement, and energy. I truly believe that my passion for teaching ESL is the result of my parents' experiences as immigrants and English language learners. I may not have experienced the hardships of moving to a new country and adapting to a new lifestyle and language, but I remember the challenges my parents faced in trying to learn English so that they could live and interact in this new land of opportunity. I am able to empathize with so many of my students as I assist them in their attempts to achieve English proficiency and adapt to their new cultural

environments because of my parents' stories and experiences as immigrants. There is no doubt that my parents influenced the knowledge and skills I developed throughout my years of schooling, and it is evident that their experiences are still influencing my practice as a language teacher.

My parents' experiences have helped me understand that the culturally diverse students in my class might come from families that value education and want to actively participate in the education of their children. I realize that my students' parents may be insecure about their ability to communicate in English, their level of education, and their knowledge and understanding of the Ontario education system. Now that I have a deeper understanding of my parents' experiences during my years of schooling, I can improve my practice as an ESL teacher. As a teacher of culturally diverse students, I believe I can influence my students' learning by recognizing the various ways their parents are involved in their education and by initiating discussions regarding accommodating the needs of ethnic minority parents in my school. By creating an awareness of the challenges ethnic minority parents experience as they attempt involvement in their children's education, I can contribute to the deconstruction of some of the negative stereotypes that exist regarding the involvement of ethnic minority parents in education and I can initiate strategies to support ethnic minority parents' involvement in the school.

My Recommendations

Although the participants feel they lack some of the embodied, objectified, and institutionalized forms of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) that can assist them in their involvement at their children's schools, in my final reflections after the interviews, I

note that all participants emphasize and understand the importance of education, and they attribute their children's success to the value they place on education from the home.

> *Even though the participants talk a lot about their lack of physical visibility in the high schools and their inability to assist their children in making decisions about courses, programs, postsecondary, and careers, they still show that education is extremely important to them and that they hope their children be successful in the future. Coincidentally, all participants see their children as successful, and they believe their success is partially the result of the value they place on education. (Journal Entry, September 7, 2008, p. 42)*

Henry (1996) supports this notion that "the alien and unfamiliar cultural practices in schools can inhibit some parental involvement; however, many minority parents hold education in high esteem as they hope for a better life, to move past the condition of inequality" (pp. 115-116). Henry, as well as the participants' of the study, have helped me realize that regardless of parents' lack of physical visibility in the school, most parents hope for the best educational experiences and opportunities for their children. As a result of the value placed on education by the participants, I believe educators can begin to disregard the stereotypes that label ethnic minority parents as uninterested, uninvolved, and disadvantaged and perhaps make an effort to recognize the parents' interests and concerns using some of the strategies and suggestions that the participants proposed.

All participants recommend providing ethnic minority parents with language support. Coincidentally, I find that making information readily available in multiple languages is a strategy most often proposed in literature (Auerbach, 2007; Constantino, 2003; Henry, 1996; Martinez-Cosio and Iannacone, 2007). Although the parents of my students generally remain distant from the school, I find that occasionally some of them contact the school whenever language support is available for them. Sometimes the

parents visit the school accompanied by their children, relatives, or friends that speak English as well as their first language. There have been a few instances in which some parents from Hispanic backgrounds have felt comfortable in visiting me at the school because I have some understanding of the Spanish language. As a child, I remember my parents always asking me to read memos, newsletters, and other school-related documents so I could translate the information for them. Based on my personal and professional experiences, I believe that offering language support to ethnic minority parents is an excellent strategy in strengthening the ties between schools and ethnic minority parents because it creates a welcoming and comfortable environment for all parents and it helps to further reinforce to parents the various ways in which they can support their children in their learning.

In addition to providing language support, all participants propose having some sort of support program readily available for ethnic minority parents in schools. I found this suggestion interesting especially because it is an idea proposed in a few studies I read when researching this topic. According to Martinez-Cosio and Iannacone (2007), school parent liaisons can act as advocates for parents, as promoters of school initiatives, and as cultural brokers. They explain that a parent liaison at a school can assist ethnic minority parents in understanding the school culture and they can educate parents on strategies for improving their children's academic achievement. Similarly, Collatos, Morrell, Nuno & Lara (2004) describe a team of liaisons that work within a culturally diverse school, and they explain that the liaisons make parents aware of school practices, procedures, and policies, as well as important information regarding postsecondary opportunities. As a result, my research findings indicate that some of the

strategies proposed by the participants of this study are actually realistic and have proven to be successful in particular situations.

As a result of my school's growing diverse student population, I recently proposed hiring an in-school liaison that can assist administrators and teachers in accommodating the needs of ethnic minority families. A liaison has been hired from an outside organization, and the liaison has already been successful in establishing new initiatives, one of which involves promoting parent-networking amongst ethnic minority parents. Three of the study's participants (Ida, Pat, and Rose) also suggest parent-networking as a means of strengthening the ties between ethnic minority parents and schools. Collatos et al. (2004) demonstrate that parent liaisons can offer ethnic minority parents the opportunity to build meaningful relationships with other adults that are experiencing similar challenges in an unfamiliar school system. Based on my recent experiences, it seems that parent-networking is especially helpful for parents that share a common language and culture because they can help each other understand the unfamiliar system and get involved in their children's schooling

The suggestions offered by the participants have the potential to encourage educators to recognize the various ways in which ethnic minority parents are already involved in their children's education, and they provide an avenue for ethnic minority parents to become fully engaged in the educational experiences of their children. Providing such supports could assist schools in accommodating the needs of ethnic minority parents; however, having the resources available to provide such supports could definitely be a struggle for some schools. Educators often have visions and dreams of model programs, supports, and services that are valuable to students'

learning; yet, factors such as space, funding, and student populations sometimes prevent the development of the ideal learning environment. As a novice researcher and teacher of students from ethnic minority families, my intention is not to immediately develop a support program at my school that meets the needs of all ethnic minority parents; however, my plan is to use the participants' suggestions as a means of initiating discussions around some of the possible ways in which we, as educators, can ensure that all parents feel welcomed, involved, and valuable in their children's learning.

At various points throughout this study, I mention the importance of ensuring that ethnic minority parents view themselves as valuable resources in their children's education. This can become a challenging task for educators, especially since sometimes schools' curricula do not integrate the culture and experiences of ethnic minority families (Nieto, 1994). Some participants (Filippo and Pat) in this study attribute their lack of involvement at the secondary level to their limited knowledge of the material taught in specific subject areas. Growing up as a child in an ethnic minority family, I do not recall the curriculum reflecting any of my family's knowledge and experiences. In my experiences as a secondary school teacher, the curricula that I am familiar with provide limited opportunities for students to explore and exhibit the knowledge and experiences they carry with them from home. Participants might feel uncomfortable about helping their children with their homework at the secondary level because their cultural capital is not valued and represented in the curricula. One possible way for educators to ensure that ethnic minority parents are able to comfortably and confidently participate in their children's learning, is by searching for

creative ways of incorporating ethnic minority families' cultural capital into lessons while meeting curriculum expectations at the same time.

Future Research

I feel that it is necessary to mention that my findings represent the attitudes, behaviours, and experiences of a small group of ethnic minority parents. All participants perceive their children as successful and they credit their children's success to the value they place on education in the home. I am left to wonder what information I would have received from the participants if they had children that were unsuccessful and failed the system. Perhaps the participants' understanding of parental involvement in education would include more than just the informal activities they discussed throughout the interviews. If the participants' children had been unsuccessful, the participants' understanding of parental involvement might have included activities such as finding tutors, sending notes to teachers, receiving notes and phone calls from teachers and administrators, and disciplining their children. The participants in this study do not reveal any stories about being mistreated, disrespected, or discriminated against in their children's schools; however, such experiences may have been shared in a larger study that included participants from various racial backgrounds. I realize that the analysis of the data presented in this study might have been different if the experiences of other participants had been explored.

The fact that 4 out of the 5 participants in this study are from European backgrounds may have also had a direct influence on the recurring themes and patterns that emerged throughout the data. Ida, Filippo, Pat, and Anthony may demonstrate a similar understanding of their involvement in their children's education because they

may share similar values, attitudes, and beliefs as a result of their European upbringing. Rose was the only South American woman that participated in the study and there were some definite differences in her experiences as an involved parent in education.

> *Unlike the other participants, Rose talked a lot about the importance of parent-networking in her home country. She talked about how she was always in contact with the other parents of students at her children's schools because they often got involved in many church and charity events. Based on her stories, it seems as though there definitely is a strong sense of community in her home town and that's probably why she feels that parent-networking amongst ethnic minority parents is so important and must be reinforced here in schools. (Journal Entry, August 15, 2008, p. 35)*

If I were to further pursue this study in the future, I believe it would be beneficial to select participants from a variety of different cultural backgrounds. It would be interesting to see if parents of different cultural backgrounds demonstrate diverse experiences, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours in terms of their involvement in the education of their children.

Earlier in this chapter, I briefly discuss the weight of having had to act as the cultural border crosser for my parents during my childhood and adolescence. The participants also indicate the pressure put on their children to act as interpreters, translators, and messengers for their parents as they familiarize themselves in an unfamiliar school setting. My participants' experiences do not reveal any information about their children's feelings regarding their role as children of ethnic minority parents. There has not been any indication as to whether or not the participants' children feel burdened, stressed, obliged, or eager to guide their parents through their challenges as ethnic minority parents. Perhaps an awareness of the children's perception of their role as ethnic minority children might have provided me with an

enriched understanding of the challenges faced by the ethnic minority family as a whole.

In my attempt to form an understanding of the experiences of some ethnic minority parents of students in Ontario schools, I have been able to provide a sneak peak of some of the participants' perceptions, challenges, and ideas. In order to gain a deeper understanding of ethnic minority parents' involvement, it would be interesting to examine how successful the development of specific parent support programs is in strengthening the relationships between educators and ethnic minority parents in schools. It would also be worthwhile to investigate how effective these parent support programs are in assisting ethnic minority students to achieve academic success. As a novice researcher and a teacher of culturally diverse students, I feel that it is in my best interest to continue asking questions and seeking answers in order to ensure that ethnic minority parents and students have the opportunity to overcome their challenges in an unfamiliar school system.

My Final Thoughts

As I conclude my study, I feel that it is necessary to acknowledge the school boards across the province that have implemented programs for the purpose of assisting and accommodating the needs of ethnic minority parents. Through various school board initiatives, such as ESL programs for adult immigrant parents, educators attempt to provide opportunities for ethnic minority parents to adapt to their new language, cultural environment, and school system. There is no doubt that these initiatives are essential and valuable in helping ethnic minority parents overcome the obstacles in establishing themselves in a new environment and culture; however further efforts are

required to ensure that ethnic minority parents have the opportunity to use their community cultural wealth as a tool to support their children in their schooling.

All students are entitled to a fair opportunity to succeed, so as educators we can ensure that all students are granted this opportunity by implementing specific strategies which include strengthening the ties between the home and school. Contrary to the perception of many educators, most ethnic minority parents are anxious and willing to help at home and are extremely concerned about their children's success at school. One of the major obstacles is that they are unfamiliar with some of the programs, policies, and procedures of the new system and they are challenged by the language barrier. As a result of the findings of this study, I have learned that, as an educator, I must encourage ethnic minority parents to understand that the various forms of capital they possess are valuable resources in their involvement in their children's education. If ethnic minority parents recognize the value of their family networks, first languages, knowledge, skills, and experiences, and if educators recognize the importance of reciprocity amongst parents and educators, perhaps ethnic minority parents may find the comfort and confidence in not only involving themselves in their children's education but perhaps taking an initial step towards becoming engaged or highly involved in their children's schooling.

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Appendix A

Interview Schedule

Title of Study: Ethnic Minority Parents' Involvement in Education: Exploring and Understanding their Experiences

Investigator: Sofia Palermo, Student, Faculty of Education, Brock University

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Susan Tilley, Faculty of Education, Brock University

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Have you ever visited your child's/children's school?

If so, how often do you visit your child's/children's school?

How do you feel when you enter the school?

Can you tell me about your last visit to the school? Why did you visit the school?

What are some challenges or problems that you experience when you enter your child's/children's school?

If you answered no to the above question, why don't you visit your child's school?

What does it mean to be involved in education?

Describe ways in which you are involved in your child/children's education?

How did parents get involved in their children's schooling back in your home country? Are there any similarities or differences?

How often does/do your child/children ask you for help with their homework?

How do you feel about helping them with their homework? Are there any challenges?

How is your involvement different or similar to the involvement of other parents?

Can you describe any ways in which your child's/children's school helps ethnic minority parents get involved in their children's education?

What do you think schools could do to strengthen their relationships with ethnic minority parents?

Appendix B

Participant Profile

Name	Age	Ethnicity	Languages at home	# of children	Education
Ida	49	Italian	Italian	1 daughter 2 sons	-Daughter and one son completed postsecondary in Ontario -One son currently attends an Ontario university
Filippo	49	Italian	Italian	1 daughter 2 sons	-Daughter and one son completed postsecondary in Ontario -One son currently attends an Ontario university
Pat	55	Greek	Greek	2 daughters 1 son	-Son and one daughter graduated from postsecondary in Ontario -One daughter attending an Ontario secondary school
Anthony	38	Portuguese	Portuguese	2 sons	-One son attends an Ontario elementary school -One son attends an Ontario secondary school
Rose	41	El Salvadorian	Spanish	2 daughters	-One daughter graduated from an Ontario secondary school -One daughter attending an Ontario secondary school

Note: Pat, Anthony, and Rose are pseudonyms to protect participants' privacy.

Appendix C

Conventions

Transcript Conventions	Explanation of Conventions
[.....]	• Words or phrases difficult to understand on audiotape
Bold	• Words or phrases stated with emotion
(Italics)	• Gestures, body language, facial expressions
Bold Italics	• Words or phrases stated in Italian by my parents (Ida and Filippo)
Italics	• Utterance

Appendix D

Matrix of A Priori and Emergent Codes

	Participant's Understanding of Parental Involvement	**Participant's Understanding of Personal Involvement**	**Challenges as an Ethnic Minority Parent**
Filippo	-Emphasis on Importance of Education -Nurturance -Homework -Interviews -Report Cards -Talk	-Nurturance -Encouragement -Report Cards -Dependence on children -More Involvement with Experience	-English Proficiency -Unfamiliar Secondary System -Unfamiliar Curriculum -Limited Contact with Secondary -Lack of Parent Networking in Secondary -Unfamiliar Education System as New Immigrant
Ida	-Nurturance -Homework -School Visits	-Nurturance -Encouragement -Lack of Involvement in Secondary -Dependence on Children -Dependence on Spouse	-English Proficiency -Unfamiliar Secondary System -Unfamiliar Curriculum -Work -Limited contact with Secondary
Pat	-Nurturance -Emphasis on Importance of Education	-Nurturance -Encouragement -Lack of Involvement in Secondary -More Involvement with Experience	-English Proficiency -Unfamiliar Secondary System -Unfamiliar Curriculum -Work -Limited Contact with Secondary -Unfamiliar Education System as New Immigrant
Anthony	-Emphasis on Importance of Education -Homework	-Nurturance -Encouragement -Talk	-English Proficiency -Unfamiliar Secondary System -Unfamiliar Curriculum

	-Interviews -Talk	-Report Cards -Elementary School Visits -Lack of Involvement at Secondary -Dependence on Spouse	-Work -Limited Contact with Secondary -Lack of Parent Networking in Secondary -Unfamiliar Education System as New Immigrant
Rose	-Emphasis on Importance of Education -Nurturance -Homework -School Visits -Report Cards -Talk	-Nurturance -Talk -Report Cards -Elementary School Visits -Lack of Involvement at Secondary -Dependence on Children	-English Proficiency -Unfamiliar Secondary System -Unfamiliar Curriculum -Work 0Lack of Parent Networking in Secondary

	The Role of the School in Accommodating Ethnic Minority Parents	**Participants' Involvement vs Perception of Others' Involvement**	**Suggestions for Schools to Help Strengthen Relationship with Ethnic Minorities**
Filippo	-Lack of Accommodations -Equal Treatment	-Unfamiliar School System -Lack of Homework Assistance	-Interpreting and Translating -Support Programs -Parent-networking
Ida	-Interpreting and Translating -Lack of Accommodations	-Lack of English Proficiency -Unfamiliar Curriculum	-Interpreting and Translating -Develop Understanding of School System -Parent-networking
Pat	-Lack of Accommodations	-Lack of English Proficiency	-Develop Understanding of School System -Support Programs
Anthony	-Interpreting and Translating -Lack of Accommodations	-Lack of English Proficiency -Unfamiliar Curriculum -Unfamiliar School	-Interpreting and Translating -Develop Understanding of School System

	-Equal Treatment	System	-Support Programs
Rose	-Lack of Accommodations -Equal Treatment	-Lack of English Proficiency -Unfamiliar Course Content -Unfamiliar School System -Lack of Homework Assistance	-Interpreting and Translating -Develop Understanding of School System -Parent-networking

Appendix E

Brock University
Office of Research Services
Research Ethics Office
St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada L2S 3A1
T: 905-688-5550, Ext. 3035/4876 F: 905-688-0748
www.brocku.ca

DATE: May 27, 2008

FROM: Michelle McGinn, Chair
Research Ethics Board (REB)

TO: Dr.Susan Tilley, Education
Sofia Palermo
FILE: 07-288 TILLEY/PALERMO

TITLE: Ethnic Minority Parents' Involvement in Education: Exploring and Understanding their Experiences

The Brock University Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above research proposal.
DECISION: Accepted as Clarified
Please Note:
• **It may be difficult to erase the voices of individual participants from tapes, should they wish to withdraw from the focus group. You may want to remove such statements from your participant materials.**
This project has received ethics clearance for the period of May 27, 2008 to August 31, 2008 subject to full REB ratification at the Research Ethics Board's next scheduled meeting. The clearance period may be extended upon request. ***The study may now proceed.***

Please note that the Research Ethics Board (REB) requires that you adhere to the protocol as last reviewed and cleared by the REB. During the course of research no deviations from, or changes to, the protocol, recruitment, or consent form may be initiated without prior written clearance from the REB. The Board must provide clearance for any modifications before they can be implemented. If you wish to modify your research project, please refer to to complete the appropriate form Revision or Modification to an Ongoing Application.

Adverse or unexpected events must be reported to the REB as soon as possible with an indication of how these events affect, in the view of the Principal Investigator, the safety of the participants and the continuation of the protocol.

If research participants are in the care of a health facility, at a school, or other institution or community organization, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to ensure that the ethical guidelines and clearance of those facilities or institutions are obtained and filed with the REB prior to the initiation of any research protocols.

The Tri-Council Policy Statement requires that ongoing research be monitored. A Final Report is required for all projects upon completion of the project. Researchers with projects lasting more than one year are required to submit a Continuing Review Report annually. The Office of Research Services will contact you when this form *Continuing Review/Final Report* is required.

Please quote your REB file number on all future correspondence.
MM/kw

Appendix F

Perceptions of Parental Involvement/Engagement

Understanding of Parents From Dominant Culture	**Understanding of Ethnic Minority Parents**
-Frequent visits to the school	-Providing nurturance (i.e., food, clothing, shelter, affection)
-Classroom volunteer	Dropping children off and picking them up from school
-Volunteer at school events	-Instilling cultural values
-Attendance and participation at school events (i.e., concerts, talent shows, science fairs, sporting events, open houses)	-Talking with children about schooling
-Attendance at cultural events (i.e., art museums, theaters)	-Checking homework
-Attendance at parent-teacher interviews	-Providing homework assistance when possible
-Belonging to parent councils	-Handling behavioral issues at home or at school
-Participating in parent-workshops	-Attendance at parent-teacher interviews
-Checking homework	-Finding children homework assistance elsewhere
-Providing homework assistance	-Encouraging children to seek homework assistance
-Phone calls to the school	-Encouraging success
-Holding high expectations	-Valuing education in the home
-Providing adult guidance in monitoring students' activities, achievements, and decisions	-Dependence on relatives, friends, spouses, and children to understand programs, policies, and students' achievements
-Sharing knowledge, skills, and experiences with educators to inform decision making	
-Discussing educational issues with educators, family, and friends	

Information is taken from literature and participants' interviews.